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THE CULTURE OF INDIVIDUALISM

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J. G. Merquior

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Aaron Wildavsky

CAN NORMS RESCUE SELF-INTEREST OR MACRO EXPLANATION BE JOINED TO MICRO EXPLANATION?

In three recent books, Jon Elster continues the project that began when he showed that Marxism lacked micro foundations. This project is the use of methodologically individualistic assumptions to understand social behavior. In his latest work, however, he supplements rational choice theory by means of non-rational "norms," begging the question of the sources and possible variations among these "given" individual value-preferences. This move invites a comparison of Elster's results with those offered by cultural theory. While not a review of Elster's recent books, these reflections on them suggest that it is better to allow for a pluralism of cultural biases than to insert "norms" into the rational-choice model on an ad hoc basis.

In the preface to *The Cement of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Jon Elster states that he "became increasingly puzzled by the relation between rational choice and social norms." As he began to work on collective bargaining in Sweden, he relates, "it soon became clear that the complexity of these bargaining problems defies explicit modelling."

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Indeed, "the more I understood what was going on, the lower I had to set my sights." How low? "The initial aim of explanation," he explains, "was gradually transformed into one of 'thick' phenomenological description" (vii). Yet from Elster's recent work it does not at all sound like he has abandoned social science.

The question Elster set out to answer was nothing less than "the conditions for order in the social world" (1). To get at these conditions, he felt that he had to understand better the relationship "between individual and collective rationality, and between self-interest and social norms" (vii). The author of a well-known critique of Marxism from a methodologically individualistic rational-choice perspective, Elster introduces social norms into his explanatory format because he believes "that social norms provide an important kind of motivation for action that is irreducible to rationality or indeed to any other form of optimizing mechanism" (15). Does bringing in avowedly nonrational norms, I ask, add a useful social element to what is otherwise an individualistic explanation? Or does it confuse explanation further by mixing in variables at different levels of meaning? The disjunction commonly made between the individual and social levels, I shall argue, is a retrograde step. For the creation and maintenance of norms is as much a product of rational choice as any other bit of goal-directed behavior.

Norms

Among norms, Elster is especially interested in what he calls " 'the norm of fairness': cooperate if and only if most other people cooperate" (123). Who would believe this and act on this belief? From a cultural perspective, this norm of fairness is specific to competitive individualism in which the people involved are free to make (or not to make) agreements and are therefore likely to take past patterns of fulfilling agreements into account. But this norm, which embodies reciprocity, does not fit in with other ways of life. Hierarchists, for instance, believe that the individual should sacrifice for the collective, the parts for the whole, without waiting for others to reciprocate. It is for the system, the whole, that sacrifices should be made, not for fallible (and quite likely corrupt) individuals. Fatalists would not cooperate under any circumstance, considering that they do not regard the past as a precedent for the future and that they believe that other people are as likely as not to do them in. Egalitarians would reject imposing the requirement of reciprocity on unequals they believe have suffered enough already.

Norms, I contend, go with cultures, with diverse ways of life, not with entire societies. Norms mediate conflicts. If everyone had the same values

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and objectives and desire to live the same way, norms would lose their point in bolstering behavioral patterns so as to support one culture over others.

In order to make his analysis of norms manageable, Elster refers to "three varieties of human motivation: (a) envy, (b) opportunism, or self-interest with guile, and (c) codes of honour" as candidates for the norms that keep a society together (250–51). Observe that these choices coincide with the three active cultures developed by Mary Douglas and presented in *Cultural Theory*[1]—envy belongs to egalitarians, opportunism to individualists, and codes of honor to hierarchists who prefer to separate statuses by attaching to each different norms that apply only to those who occupy a certain social position. The millwright may well be honorable but codes of honor belong only to such statuses as knights and lords. Far from being a matter of universal reprobation, moreover, opportunism, interpreted as entrepreneurship, is a cause for wonder, awe, and celebration among individualists.[2]

"The serenity of mind that allows us to determine whether we are happy without comparing ourselves with others is rare. If the comparison is unfavourable," Elster writes, "we feel a pang of envy, a fleeting rage, soon suppressed because of the recognition that the feeling is ignoble" (252). Why ignoble? The cultural question is, "Comparison with whom?" If the comparison is made on the basis of what is normative in a given culture, what calls forth envy from individuals who adhere to one way of life should call forth different and opposing reactions from those who support different ways of life. It is not the absolute amount of difference, as sociologists know, but the difference between what is observed and what is normative that matters. In hierarchies, where large differences in status and resources are justified, for instance, feelings of envy would be deemed ignoble and the person who experiences such undesirable emotions may well feel that he is ignoble. In a group governed by equality of condition, by contrast, differences in power and other resources are unjust and immoral; hence rage would be justified. Indeed, egalitarians might tell each other that failing to feel enraged is wrong.

When individuals feel they have failed by comparison with others, Elster sees that envy is a way of blaming those others. But he does not ask the cultural question, namely, what sort of people, sharing which values and beliefs and justifying which pattern of social relations, would be prone to assign blame in this way or in other ways? Because they believe that differences in power and other resources are unjustified, egalitarians blame the system, e.g., corporate capitalism, an alliance of hierarchy and individualism, for their misfortunes, envying those who they believe are unfairly advantaged by that system. Hierarchists are much more likely to blame

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deviants for not following the rules their organizations use to keep people from devouring one another. Individualists either blame government regulation or themselves, explaining that they would do well if competition were purer or if their luck or capacities were greater. Fatalists might conceivably blame themselves for trusting others or for expecting things to turn out well but are most likely to blame fate, the essentially unfathomable chaos that makes life unpredictable. Like envy, blame is a function of culture.

By introducing norms, which he explicitly defines as noninstrumental to one's immediate advantage, Elster makes preferences endogenous to rational choice models. By contrast, neoclassical economics, the paradigm on which rational choice theories are based, makes preferences exogenous, i.e., outside the system being modeled. Thus, in Elster's new account, whatever self-interest does not explain may be explained by dropping into rational-choice models ad hoc preferences called norms.

At the end of these critical reflections about Elster's recent books, I shall use Elster's discussion of "envy" to show, contra Elster, that there is a great deal that can be said about the origins, operation, maintenance, and decline of social norms (discussed in *The Cement of Society*) from a cultural standpoint. A norm invoked by adherents of all ways of life is not useful in explaining either cooperation or conflict. A virtue of analyzing different ways of life is showing that the phenomenon in question manifests itself differently according to how people relate to one another and justify these relationships. Seeing societies as composed of clumps of individuals, held together by mutual advantage until they mysteriously bump into norms that push them off the track of self-interest, has a certain appeal. But it is not as good as explaining who shares which norms with whom and why. By rooting behavior in social life, by treating individuals as social beings, I shall argue, both norms and interests may be placed on the same analytic plane.

Mechanisms

In addition to "norms," Elster has devised another creative way of reducing expectations to the point where he believes our present capacities as social scientists are adequate to give good value. "Mechanisms" are to replace "causes" as the best explanation we can find for human action. Thus Elster opens *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) by writing that "the emphasis in this book is on *explanation by mechanisms*. It offers a toolbox of mechanisms—nuts and bolts, cogs and wheels—that can be used to explain quite complex social phenomena" (3).[3] As will become apparent, however, circumlocutions like

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"mechanisms" cannot get one away from problems of "causation." Indeed, if "mechanisms" are not "causes," what use would they be?

Thus, with his modest mechanisms, Elster has to address the same issue as those who aspire to larger-scale social theory, namely, specifying the unit of analysis, and then showing how the "micro," the behavior of the individual units, combines to form the "macro" patterns observed in society. In specifying the elementary micro aspects of explanation in the social sciences, their nuts and bolts, Elster plumps for individuals rather than collectives. After all, he reasons, collectives do not act; they are sometimes useful fictions (e.g., "classes") but only real people, actual individuals, can act.[4] It was just this fact that, Elster argued previously, Marx overlooked: he failed to provide microfoundations for his macrotheory.[5] Elster now suggests that future social scientists can link together micro and macro (as it were) mechanistically.

As a reaction against the tendency to give collective entities uniform motives by treating them as if they had group minds, anti-collective forms of explanation are appropriate. But as an aid to explanation in the social sciences, I shall argue, they are misleading. While only real individuals can act, their premises as to the good life and how to achieve it are the joint products of many individuals laid down over long periods of time. They are socially constructed. Not only getting what you want but deciding what you want are part and parcel of the interpersonal construction, modification, and destruction of institutions through which individuals figure out what they ought to prefer.[6] Abstracted from the social influences operating within them, the actions of individuals make no sense. Meaning comes from social interaction, for without social validation all there is is one person shouting into the wind. Ability to be persuaded and to persuade others, to hold others accountable and to be held accountable, is crucial in human life. Hence no general explanations (general in accounting for like individuals) are possible without introducing social explanations.

While only the real can act, moreover, only the artificial can explain. This is the meaning of Lévi-Strauss's well-known but insufficiently understood designation of the anthropologist as the astronomer of the social sciences.[7] Down here on earth are the real flesh-and-blood people interacting; up there in the rarefied atmosphere of social science are the models, the graphic representations of the artificial (man-made), created (out of whole cloth) theories that purport to explain the real behavior below. With this, I think, Elster wants to agree. His choice of the individual level of analysis is a fateful one, however, for the more a nominal, real level is chosen, the more individuals are viewed in their particularity. This won't do.

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There is not, nor can there be, such a strange creature as an isolated individual. This is as much true for those among us who practice competitive individualism as it is for those who prefer more collective forms of social relations. Neither sports teams nor scientists racing for priority in discovery nor capitalist enterprises carried on by consenting adults would be possible if individuals lacked social ties. It is the social character of those ties—whether individuals transact for themselves or are bound by group decisions, whether they recognize authority or are free to act for themselves—that matters.

I shall refer to cultures or ways of life or forms of social organization interchangeably as consisting of two elements: (1) a pattern of social relationships justified by (2) cultural biases (or ideologies), with the relationships and the biases always bound together. People learn what to prefer by simultaneously choosing who to relate to and how to relate to them.

We can take Elster's *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* as the best possible defense of using the real individual as the fundamental level of analysis. But can Elster then bring together the micro and the macro, the individual and the collective modes of analysis? Because this is deliberately a bare-bones book, we may turn for an answer to another of his recent volumes, *Solomonic Judgements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), which has the virtue of imparting balance to Elster's views by emphasizing the limitations of human rationality. And then, by returning to Elster's *The Cement of Society*, in which he goes further in limiting rational choice explanations while calling for them to be supplemented by social norms, I shall contrast his analytical half-way house—mechanisms, not causes; individual rationality with collective irrationality in the form of shared norms of behavior—with a socio-cultural theory that intertwines the macro with the micro.

Time Horizons Vary with Cultural Context

Like most social scientists, but far more self-consciously, Elster argues that behavior is explained by a mixture of desires and opportunities, what people want compared to what they can get. He also states in a footnote, quite rightly, that "the opportunity set rarely reduces to literally one physical option" (*Nuts and Bolts*, 15). So far, so good. Why, then, does he attach this footnote to his repetition of the old canard, designed to show that choice is illusory, to the effect that both the beggar and the businessman have the same opportunity to sleep under bridges in Paris? True, they have different opportunities, but the aphorism wrongly suggests that poor people have no ability to alter their situation by, say, reducing their needs or increasing their resources. Were these opportunities lacking, no one

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ever could rise from poverty or, for that matter, descend into it. If ever we are to understand what is called the "culture of poverty," we need to know what sort of people (1) perceive others as so untrustworthy as not to make cooperation worthwhile, and (2) perceive the world as so random as to make intervention in it worthless or even dangerous, so that (3) it is best to get out of harm's way. These are not just any sort of people, they are "fatalists."[8]

Who (what sorts of people, organized into which ways of life, sharing values that legitimate their preferred pattern of social relations, which, in turn, helps generate their values) has short or long time horizons? The longest are characteristically those of hierarchists who chain their future to their past, honoring their ancestors because they wish to anchor their collectivity in the weight of history.[9] Competitive individualists, by contrast, anchor the present in the future, apportioning their time according to the expected payoff. They ration their capital by means of interest rates that discount the future in the present. Individualists are the ones whose values, beliefs, and behavior are captured by the expected-utility theories invoked by proponents of rational choice explanations.

The shortest time horizon of all belongs to fatalists who see no point in preparing for a future that, in principle, cannot be known. Nor, in their own eyes, would the measures they take likely be effective except by accident. So why bother? Fatalists live largely in the present, neither attempting to anticipate the future, which is in principle unknowable, nor relying on the past to buttress authority they never expect to acquire except by chance.

Finally, egalitarians are interested in using the long-run dangers they believe are caused by the established cultures (individualism and hierarchy) to compel these rival ways of life to pay for threatening the planet with imminent destruction. Thus the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) declares that "no one in IIED takes progress in 1992 for granted, given the potential conflicts ahead. The North *must now pay* for using the environment so profligately. . . ."[10] Rather than lengthening time horizons, egalitarians foreshorten them, bringing all the dangers they imagine in the future into the present.

Time horizon is a function of how far it appears worthwhile for individuals who adhere to different ways of life to shorten or lengthen the future in order to strengthen their culture and weaken their rivals. This answer must be given in terms of individuals, for that is the only way of determining whether the predictions just described are true. But it cannot be explained in terms of individuals as discrete entities because their identification with a common way of life, and their interaction in support of that way, is a major cause of their time preferences.

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Neither long nor short time horizons could exist without cultural support. Unless people were prepared to defend the structural inequalities of a hierarchical way of life, for instance, they would not support the endless line of "who begat whom" to prove who deserves high or low status. And if fatalists believed the world followed predictable patterns, they would find it difficult to justify to other people their focus on the present.

If Institutions Form Preferences, Innovation Cannot Be Explained by Individual Differences

Elster rightly resists the temptation to explain all behavior by individual variations in opportunities; he recognizes that desires differ among individuals. But if this is so, then where is the nut or bolt that deals with why people want what they want, i.e., with the formation and alteration of preferences? A danger of rational choice explanations is that they make preferences into a *deus ex machina* that drops from the sky uncaused. A theory of human behavior that starts by (silently) saying "Assume Preferences!" leaves a lot to be desired. What is more, the social individual, the person influenced by and influencing others, is truncated by immaculate conception notions of the source of individual preferences: the part that institutions play in forming the preferences of the individuals who compose them is missing.

At what time, Elster asks, do people innovate or revolt? When they are badly off, he answers, they possess the motivation but lack the capacity; and when they are well off they possess the capacity but lack the motivation. Since desires and opportunities run in opposite directions, Elster argues, it is not possible to decide a priori whether hard or soft times favor innovation or revolt. Fair enough. Such across-the-board explanations, however, imply that the preference for innovation (or the lack thereof) is spread equally in the population.

Recent events in Eastern Europe suggest otherwise. They cast light on the apparent anomaly that fear of loss inhibits innovation, yet innovation is much greater in capitalist countries, where such loss is possible, than in communist countries, where decision makers stand no risk of losing capital they have not invested. Because they could not fail, I would argue, managers in command economies were doomed not to succeed. They were always better off lobbying than producing. Their gains from innovation were limited by the practices of an exclusive hierarchy in which others got most of the rewards of change. Since they lacked capital assets, they were unable to use the resources acquired through innovation to make further investments. This was equivalent to the pre-capitalist situation in which accumulation was rendered difficult because of the necessity

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of distributing it to numerous relatives and hangers-on, a phenomenon curbed by the invention of the joint-stock company, from which those who did not contribute capital could not reallocate resources to themselves. The point is not only that individualists have a higher preference for innovation than hierarchists, but that an individualistic culture within a society that facilitates market transactions fosters a greater desire to innovate than does a hierarchical one embedded in a society that hampers market arrangements, such as a Soviet-style command economy.[11] Without introducing the cultural contexts through which institutions create and reinforce preferences, innovation and revolt and much more cannot be explained.

For instance, many social scientists assume that cooperation in securing agreed objectives is always desirable. When cooperation is lacking, therefore, they are surprised. Were there people who prefer a way of life in which cooperation is perceived to be undesirable, however, the explanation might lie in their culture, not in their perversity. Were the question not why do people cooperate per se but why different types of cooperation are fostered and opposed by individuals who adhere to each culture, more variegated and more interesting answers might be given.

Cooperation As a Function of Culture

"Collective action problems arise," Elster informs his readers, "because it is difficult to get people to cooperate for their mutual benefit" (*Nuts and Bolts*, 131). This important and apparently unexceptional sentence nevertheless contains multiple difficulties due to its methodologically individualistic premises. Since people prefer different ways of life, they also differ on what is "mutual" or "beneficial." Thus egalitarians may object to programs that improve life for most people if inequality is thereby increased; hierarchists may object to improved education if it results in attacks on authority; fatalists may object to paying for programs that promise to better their lot because they do not believe this will happen. The assumption that all of us use the same evaluative framework, stated this baldly, is false.

Cultures may be conceived as viable institutional answers to problems of how to retain order or, in this locution, cooperation. It follows that different forms of cooperation support different cultures. One kind, cooperation via coercion, binds individuals to accept the collective will. Individuals can cooperate by being told (hierarchy) or by consensus (egalitarianism) to decide what to do. But individuals can also cooperate through a series of bilateral bargains, A with B, B with C, A with D, on and on. Or there can be a decentralized nexus to which all are tied—the individualist network—though none are directly connected to each other. Thus activity

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may be directed toward common ends without most individuals being aware of or agreeing upon them. Among the active cultures, *it is the form of cooperation—hierarchical or egalitarian or individualistic—that is at issue, not the fact of cooperation.*

The first moral of this story is that not everyone believes in cooperation. The second moral is that not everyone agrees on how cooperation should be organized. Though hierarchists value cooperation, for instance, they prefer that it be organized from the top down, while individualists and egalitarians (who intensely dislike others prescribing for them) want it to grow from the bottom up. And while individualists believe that what is fair is what is freely agreed, egalitarians believe that agreements cannot fairly be reached unless the participants possess equivalent resources.

Adherents of the passive cultures reject cooperation as undesirable in principle; for if nature is a random walk and people are unpredictable, as fatalists believe, working with others is likely to prove harmful. In addition, the hermits who inhabit the autonomous culture seek neither to coerce others nor to be coerced by them. They seek understanding by distancing themselves from the biases of the active cultures. Hence the sine qua non of their autonomy is staying out of the rat race, i.e., not taking sides, which means not cooperating with others.

Is Rational Choice Rational?

"Rational-Choice theory," Elster writes, "aims at explaining human behavior. . . . The first step is to determine what a rational person would do in the circumstances. The second step is to ascertain whether this is what the person actually did" (*Nuts and Bolts*, 30). Faced with the same circumstance, different individuals would be judged as more or less rational according to whether their acts were or were not efficacious in obtaining their preferences or objectives. How, though, might we judge the rationality of individuals pursuing different and opposed ends? Could opposed strategies be rational if their adherents sought contradictory ends? Though one could interpret Hume's famous statement that "reason is and must be the servant of the passions" to mean the dominance of irrational forces, it could also signify that the passions—i.e., our commitments to fundamental premises—determine our objectives, and all reason can do is attempt to choose means well-suited to these ends. "What love does," as Arthur Stinchcombe wrote recently, "is to set the terms which decide what will be pursued as the objective of rational behavior."[12] This later view—passions control choice of objectives, reason only the means of achieving them—is compatible with a view of rationality as instrumental and, because passions vary, plural.

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That desires themselves may be deemed irrational, which is Elster's position, suggests that rationality be given not an instrumental but a substantive meaning. Thus Elster tries out the position that irrational desires are those that, if fulfilled, would make us unhappy. Nice try. But it won't work. There are people, as Elster recognizes, for whom bestiality is happiness.

I am sympathetic to those who wish to deny the honorable cover of rationality to evil acts. Were the Khmer Rouge rational in killing off everyone who was different in order to create the world's most egalitarian rural society?[13] Was Stalin rational in creating and maintaining the Gulag? If so, is it just their methods that were irrational? Or is it that their desires or objectives themselves were irrational?

Objectives may be horrifying but, if we wish to retain usages helpful to social science, only means may be said to be rational, not ends. Otherwise, a useful bit of nomenclature designed to get at the motivation of human action—they did this because they wanted that—will become a substitute for reflective moral discourse. Applying the terminology of reason to moral ends also has the unfortunate consequence of drawing attention away from the crucial and conceptually prior question of why it is that people want what they want. After all, it is not hard to understand *how* the Khmer Rouge murdered so many Cambodians. It is *why* they wanted to do it in the first place that is puzzling.

It confuses understanding to identify desirability with efficacy. That is why, for social science, I prefer to keep "rationality" as an instrumental term regarding the degree to which means are reasonably adapted to ends.

If there is an infinite (or a very large) number of patterns of social relations whose shared values can attract supporters and hold on to them over time, each would carry its own form of means-ends rationality, making communication, let alone social science, precarious. Yet if there are only a few viable cultures, rationality has a comprehensible meaning: the rational person seeks to defend her way of life. Irrational acts thus become those aimed at supporting a culture while actually undermining it. Hence irrationality is subsumed under the rubric of unanticipated and/or unwanted consequences. In that regard, we would have no regrets, having always got what we wanted instead of, as often happens, what we deserve or despise.

States of Nature As Cultural Constructs

"In the state of nature—a fictitious state much discussed by philosophers," Elster tells us, "people live in the present and care only about themselves"

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(*Nuts and Bolts*, 42). Other than the view that this odd state is "dismal" (52) we are given no further information about it. Yet caring about others, whether friendly or not, is precisely what makes our lives human.

Is this state of nature nevertheless a useful fiction, as Elster would have it—a thought experiment, so to speak, revealing crucial aspects of human experience that might otherwise remain hidden or obscure? I think not for two reasons: first, the state of nature as traditionally presented suggests there can be only one such state, thus violating the principle of cultural pluralism; second, this singular state is composed of institutionally disembodied individuals, thus violating from the start the precept that human beings are social creatures.

Elster asserts that "the elementary unit of social life is the individual human action" (13). This sentence is marvelously hedged; one cannot tell whether the writer is referring to the socialized or the isolated individual. Are our concepts of the individual to be conceived, for instance, as socially constructed, differing according to various modes of relating to other individuals—for example, hierarchists versus egalitarians? Thus egalitarians attribute goodness to human nature except when it is unfortunately corrupted by evil institutions, while hierarchists construct a different human nature—humans are born bad and hence need to be restrained and improved by good institutions in which superiors rule inferiors. Socialized individuals both shape and are shaped by social institutions.

From Elster's methodologically individualistic perspective, the state of nature makes sense because it portrays individuals as self-interested. For Elster follows the common view that "a major task of the social sciences is to explain why we are not in the state of nature." The explanation is that self-interested individuals refuse to cooperate for the common good, making a collective imposition of order the only way to avoid misery.

In contradistinction, a culturally pluralist thought experiment would either have no state of nature—for "in the beginning" there were social relations—or there would be different such states for each viable form of social organization, the question being "how many" and "what kind." After all, beings would not be recognizably human if they were not from their earliest beginnings socially involved. If what matters most to people is their relationships with other people, then the "nuts and bolts" of human life are social.

All of us may be self-interested, but our conceptions of what is "self" and of what is in the interests of this self may differ. Unless the assertion of self-interest is part of a theory of how different individuals come to understand what interests are theirs, it is empty. And if individual conceptions of what constitutes self-interest differ in regard to the same objects of

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concern, opposing actions may be "rational" for different people. Could this be true of such well-worn antinomies as selfishness versus altruism?

Selfishness and Altruism

Nowhere is the dependence of meaning upon cultural context more evident than in regard to the aggressive manner in which concepts of selfishness and altruism have come to be used as put-downs and puff-ups. Elster writes as if selfishness and altruism are clearly distinguishable. And so they are, if one assumes that these terms have a universal meaning fixed for all time. But they do not; a wealth of examples is available to illustrate how social forces alter meanings.

At the outset, it should be recognized that in society at large, altruism, helping others, is considered good and selfishness, helping yourself, is considered bad. These labels have beneficent and pejorative meanings, such that those not wishing to be put down find it hard to resist them. They do so by reconstructing the labels, opening up two interesting possibilities: first, that whatever the relevant actors wish to do will be deemed altruistic or other-regarding, and whatever they disapprove of will be termed selfish or self-regarding; second, that the definitional criteria will be altered so that acting for the benefit of others will be considered selfish whereas acting strictly in one's own behalf is considered altruistic. Who would ever think in this second way?

The advocate of individualism, Ayn Rand, championed "rational selfishness," by which she meant that society is better off if every individual looks out first and foremost for himself than if each person thinks only of others. To her, what others call altruism is officious meddling; worse, altruism results in poverty, slavery, mediocrity, and a host of other evils too numerous to mention. In a culture of individualism, which rationalizes self-regard, societal welfare comes from entrepreneurs who take risks in order to gain rewards by finding better ways to satisfy existing preferences or even by creating new ones. Similarly, F.A. Hayek holds that trying to mold the world by mandating altruistic actions, which he calls "constructivism,"[14] has awful consequences, while removing obstacles to individual initiative (i.e., liberating selfishness) vastly increases social welfare, albeit in ways unknown before the acts that bring them about. Looked at in Rand's way, individual selfishness, as commonly conceived, becomes societal altruism.

In his *Disquisition On Government*, John C. Calhoun argued that

> it may be well doubted, whether the stronger feeling or affection of individuals for themselves, combined with a feebler and subordinate feeling or

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> affection for others, is not, in beings of limited reason and faculties, a constitution necessary to their preservation and existence. If reversed—if their feelings and affections were stronger for others than for themselves, or even as strong, the necessary result would seem to be, that all individuality would be lost; and boundless and remediless disorder and confusion would ensue. For each, at the same moment, intensely participating in all the conflicting emotions of those around him, would, of course, forget himself and all that concerned him immediately, in his officious intermeddling with the affairs of all others; which, from his limited reason and faculties, he could neither properly understand nor manage. . . . Government would be impossible; or, if it could by possibility exist, its object would be reversed. Selfishness would have to be encouraged and benevolence discouraged. Individuals would have to be encouraged, by rewards, to become more selfish, and deterred, by punishments, from being too benevolent; and this, too, by a government, administered by those who, on the supposition, would have the greatest aversion for selfishness and the highest admiration for benevolence.
>
> To the Infinite Being, the Creator of all, belongs exclusively the care and superintendence of the whole.[15]

Is it irrational to believe with Calhoun that bad things happen to people as a result of misguided efforts to promote altruism?

For fatalists, by contrast, there are no altruistic actions. No actions can be accepted at face value because no one can be trusted to act from good motives. He caters to her, fatalists perceive, not out of love but because her success makes him more powerful. Contra fatalism, Elster argues that despite every effort to deny the existence of other-regarding motives, there really are actions that are impelled by the desire to help other people. True enough to some of us, but not to everyone. Such statements, I have just explained, would not appear credible in a fatalistic culture.

Altruism is propagated only in cultures with strong group boundaries. There must be a well-defined collective to be sacrificed for. Collectivists specify who is to do what for whom in order to count as altruistic, viz. the individual is to sacrifice for the system, as in hierarchy, or, as in egalitarianism, the group is to sacrifice for the worst off. Unless analysis states conditions for altruism, it ceases to be a term of social science and becomes largely what it is now, a term of praise or abuse.

Envy

A considerable merit of *Nuts and Bolts* is that Elster considers feelings social scientists usually ignore, like spite, envy, and jealousy, by which people get their kicks making other people worse off. "A depressing fact about

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many peasant societies," he writes, "is that people who do better than others are often accused of witchcraft and thus pulled down to, or indeed below, the level of others. Against this background, ruthless selfishness can have a liberating effect" (59). These two sentences, however, hide material that remains unexamined because the emotions in question are believed either to be spread randomly around society or confined to certain classes, e.g., peasants. But why should peasants be more spiteful and envious than corporate executives or, for that matter, social scientists? And why should witchcraft be directed at powerful rather than marginal people?

"If traditional, envy-ridden societies are permeated by accusations of witchcraft," Elster writes, "many transitional societies are subject to rampant opportunism, corruption and cynicism" (60). Unfortunately, the term "traditional" does not tell us what form or forms of social organization are involved. Usually "traditional" is a synonym for hierarchical. In a hierarchy, status and power differences are accepted by the lower as well as the upper orders as legitimate. To the extent that the individuals involved believe in hierarchy, therefore, they should feel no envy if they are on the bottom. This does not apply, by contrast, to altruists, for those who believe in helping the worst off also believe that equality of condition should be the norm. People within egalitarian cultures, therefore, are subject to accusations of witchcraft—evil outside influences invading the innocent collective body, pretending to believe in equality but actually minions of Satan or, in secular terms, secret agents of hidden hierarchies. In the fruit color chart of political deceit, oreos, radishes, and bananas (blacks, reds and yellows) appear to be people of color on the outside but are actually white (Caucasian) on the inside.

Norms Vary with Cultures

Elster sees that natural selection cannot explain "why [norms] vary so much across societies and why they take so many different forms: altruism, duty, fairness." He is especially concerned about the lack of "any plausible candidates for the mechanisms by which the beneficial consequences of norms keep them in place." He looks for the source of norms in the personality of individuals but he does not find them there. "Norms, in my view," he writes, "result from psychological propensities about which we know little." While he could spin stories about how norms might have come into the world, he has "nothing to say about how they actually did emerge" (123).

The societal and the individual levels, are, I think, the wrong places to look for norms. Society is too large and lumpy, containing, as it must,

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adherents of several ways of life, albeit in different proportions, to give direction to the individual, and the individual alone is too isolated to be distinguished from the beasts of the field. Cultures, by contrast, are sufficiently diverse to contain substantive differences while being sufficiently well formed and purposeful to give individuals direction. When individuals are born into or converted into a way of life, they can both receive instruction and give it to others, run the maze while shaping it, so as to learn and sustain the norms of their culture.

Just as the rational person supports her way of life, so culturally rational people weave a web of practices so regular that social scientists say they occur as if guided by a specific norm. In short, norms exist because, through repeated iterations, adherents of a way of life find them useful in compressing and communicating the shared values that justify the patterns of social relations that make up their cultures.

This cultural proposition explains why norms may differ within a country due to ineradicable cultural pluralism. A norm supporting hierarchy, say, duty to the collective, would not be appropriate for individualists, who prefer to negotiate their own obligations, or to fatalists who believe that life has enough blows in store for them without voluntarily expending energy and money on things that, in their estimation, can't possibly help them. While egalitarians might also generate a norm of duty, everyone would be held to have the same duty, whereas the duty of hierarchists would be held to vary with their station in life. In addition, the egalitarian obligation would be to social justice defined as greater equality of condition, whereas the hierarchical duty is to social order via the system of ranked statuses.

The rationality postulates surrounding choice theory are now crumbing, I suspect, because they are supposed to apply to nearly everyone without taking cultural diversity into account. Amos Tversky, Paul Slovic, and Daniel Kahneman put it pungently:

> A growing body of empirical evidence questions the assumption of invariance, which is essential to the theory of rational choice. In particular, alternative framings of the same options (for example, in terms of gains versus losses, or in terms of survival versus mortality) produce inconsistent preferences, and alternative elicitation procedures (for example, choice, pricing) give rise to reversal of preferences. . . .
>
> Indeed, the failures of description invariance (framing effects) and procedure invariance (elicitation effects) pose a greater problem for rational choice models than the failure of specific axioms, such as independence or transitivity, and they demand descriptive models of much greater complexity. Violations of description invariance require an explicit treatment of the framing process, which precedes the evaluation of prospects.[16]

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Cultural pluralism allows for alternative "framing processes."[17] People's choices change as the cultural frame in which they appear changes. Indeed, framing policy proposals so they appeal to people with varying preferences is part of political skill. The policies at issue are not identical if, when phrased one way, they support this culture and, phrased that way, they support another. When confronted with anomalies, puzzles, or dilemmas, therefore, social scientists should look for the frames of reference human beings use to make the values they share and the relations they wish to legitimate apply to a particular set of circumstances. These frames should not be conceived as disembodied but as selected to support a way of life and to reject others. No theory that conceives of rationality as singular comports with the diversity either of human goals or the cultures that sustain them.

Cultural Monism

Aware of the weak underpinnings of rational choice theory, Elster argues, in *Solomonic Judgements*, "that *failure to recognize the indeterminacy of rational-choice theory can lead to irrational behaviour*" (2, emph. in orig.). As Elster explains it, rational choice theory claims that the actions of individuals are explicable as attempts to satisfy preexisting desires. Thus individuals act to make themselves better off, as they define "better," by considering, in light of their limitations of time and energy, evidence about what would, in their circumstances, be most efficacious. Yet, he thinks that rational choice theory can easily become a form of hyperrationality ("the irrational belief in the omnipotence of reason," 17) which postulates unrealistically protracted deliberation among means in an attempt to encompass more things together than are necessary for the solution of a particular problem or the satisfaction of a specific desire.

In commenting on Herbert Simon's notion of "satisficing," for example, Elster observes that

> there is to my knowledge no robust explanation of why people have the aspiration levels they do, nor of why they use the particular search rules they do. The [satisficing] theory describes behaviour, but does not really explain it. Now, one might say that a similar criticism applies to rational-choice theory, which does not, after all, explain why people have the preferences they do. The hypothesis that people behave rationally is nevertheless simpler, more general and more powerful than the assumption that they are guided by their aspiration levels. In the theory of the firm, for instance, rational-choice theory needs only one assumption, namely that the firm maximizes profits. Satisficing theory needs many assumptions, stipulating

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> one aspiration level for each of the many subroutines of the firm and, when that level is not attained, one search mechanism for each routine. (29–30)

This neat comparison helps explain why theories involving aids to calculation are supplements to but not replacements for rational choice theory. So Elster holds on to the cultural monism of rational choice theory.

Consequently, though his analyses of the rationality of such diverse phenomena as vengeance (What does it get you?), dress and etiquette (Why go to the expense?), and deciding difficult matters of policy by lot (Why decide by chance?) expand a reader's consciousness, they omit insights that come from a culturally pluralist conception of society. I shall begin contrasting monism with pluralism by asking, with Elster, whether vengeance might be rational, not to all individuals but rather to culturally diverse people.

Thus "the norm of vengeance practised in many traditional societies," Elster writes in *Solomonic Judgements*, "is triggered by an earlier offence, not motivated by future rewards. Indeed, from the future-oriented point of view vengeance is pointless at best, suicidal at worst" (33). Again, as in *Nuts and Bolts*, Elster assumes either that everyone has the same preferences or that the action involved has the same meaning to everyone concerned. Why not consider vengeance an altruistic act designed to enhance the security of a family by making it prohibitively expensive to engage in aggressive acts against one of its members? Indeed, if vengeance is honored, no retaliation against the avenger may be undertaken. I refer here not to a tribe of preindustrial people but to the recent tendency within the United States for juries to find in favor of women who have been physically abused but who nonetheless do not dispute that they killed their husbands or lovers. Judges and juries of an egalitarian persuasion might honor these acts of vengeance as just because the physically weaker or oppressed person requires special protection, but in a hierarchical culture only specified authorities would be allowed to punish.

Elster goes on to propose that "norms of dress and etiquette do not seem to serve any ulterior purpose, unlike for instance traffic rules that serve to prevent accidents" (*Solomonic Judgements*, 33). This might well be true from a strictly individualistic, utilitarian perspective but not, I think, from the vantage point of other cultural biases. Dress and etiquette do serve to prevent accidents of a social or moral kind in which people who should not have relations do have them and people who need to communicate with others of their own ilk are unable to find them expeditiously by virtue of their outward signs. People in strongly bounded cultures, for instance, are likely to use clothing and manners (including the lack of them) as markers distinguishing the good inside from the bad outside. The difference is that while hierarchies glory in distinctions (ornaments, gar-

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goyles, fancy clothes full of distinctions down to the Order of the Garter), egalitarians prefer what the English call "voluntary simplicity" or the Germans designate as Bauhaus architecture and early Americans as homespun clothing. Socially sanctioned norms of dress and etiquette are just as much forms of communication as traffic lights; indeed, the similarity is worth pursuing. The difference between norms and "ulterior purposes" as explanatory forces is the same as the difference between functional and rational choice explanations.

Lotteries and Equalities

Elster explores the uses and abuses of lotteries as embodying the principle of choice by randomization. He is interested in knowing the conditions under which lotteries might be forbidden or allowed on grounds of justice or rational choice. He expands uses of the principle of randomness by applying it to welfare policy. This is a bravura performance. And it opens up possibilities of a deeper discussion of how adherents of different cultures think about what is fair. For we can take it for granted that cultural biases are themselves theories telling adherents what is just, including how to (and not to) relate to other people.

In the last chapter of *Solomonic Judgements*, "The Possibility of Rational Politics," Elster writes that

> the welfare state corresponds to a widespread belief that it would be unfair to let individuals suffer from genetic accidents outside their control. In this perspective, the meritocratic conception appears inconsistent. If social luck is to be eliminated as a determinant of welfare, why should genetic luck be respected? . . . How can one defend the view that a low level of ambition and a high rate of time discounting are not also the products of social and genetic luck? If they are, why do they not provide grounds for compensation? This seems to be the central philosophical question in current controversies over the welfare state. (211)

"Genetic luck" suggests an egalitarian bias in assuming that individuals do not own their own accomplishments—either the drive to do the work or the capacity. In that case, all individuals are equally (un)deserving. The term "social luck" expresses the belief that the world works like a lottery. Those who believe that it is not worthwhile trying to improve one's chances in life, because rewards are distributed at random, are not likely to invest for the future or to work any harder than they are compelled to.

There is a big difference between treating randomization as a different type of strategy and randomization as the premise underlying a way of life. Elster does not consider the consequences of fatalism, the culture

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whose adherents believe (as Mrs. Gaskell put it in her nineteenth-century novel on class warfare in England) that "life is like a lottery," for social welfare. Lotteries, for instance, take the most money from the poor. Is this irrational for people who believe that no effort on their part will help them? The social scientist should ask how the presence of a substantial number of fatalists who believe that life is lottery-like affect individual behavior. The understanding that fatalism makes sense to its adherents is the beginning of wisdom in approaching the plight, both socially caused and individually maintained, of people who act in ways that keep them poor over long periods of time.

Although he worries about the implications for self-government of giving welfare on the grounds that the person involved cannot form his own preferences or otherwise act to assist himself, Elster feels that citizens should be required to do things that they can do. Yet he also believes that applying this principle to most contemporary societies

> would be widely and correctly perceived as unfair, because the economic means to form autonomous preferences are massively unequally distributed. In any society there will be individuals who for idiosyncratic reasons are deaf to incentives and, in more serious cases, have to be supported by the state. In a society with fair background conditions the support would, however, not be offered as compensation; and the supported individuals would, like the mentally ill, be more or less randomly distributed across all social groups. Most contemporary societies do not approach this condition. They contain large groups whose members are systematically prevented, by poverty and lack of employment opportunities, from developing the mental attitude of holding themselves responsible for their actions. To treat them as if the background conditions were just, telling them that they have only themselves to blame for their failure, would be a massive piece of bad faith. As long as the influence of genuinely arbitrary features such as wealth has not been eliminated, justice may require us to count as morally arbitrary some features which would be considered nonarbitrary in the absence of the former. (*Solomonic Judgements*, 212–13)

These comments are rich in cultural significance.

Attribution of blame is one of the diagnostic features of human life. Who is to be held accountable for what misfortune is a central question. But answers (including the answer that blame, like all other causation, occurs at random) are not randomly distributed. Hierarchists blame the deviant individual who resists the rules of a praiseworthy system; they would never dream of denying to legitimate authorities the right to enforce the responsibility of individuals for their actions. Egalitarians blame the system that oppresses basically good people. Elster's comments reveal how far egalitarian thought is prepared to go in blaming society for

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stopping individuals from developing a sense of responsibility. His qualification—the elimination of differences in wealth and other differences he considers arbitrary might lead him to enforce the norm of individual responsibility—shows that no society with individualistic and/or hierarchical tendencies could win his approval. By contrast, individualists blame either the authorities for unwanted intervention or the individual who did not compete well enough. That accumulation of wealth is "morally arbitrary" is a position with which they will never agree.

Always there are multiple theories available to determine who is to blame for misfortune. Which one is chosen is under-determined by the evidence. Otherwise it would not be possible to understand that what Elster considers "a massive piece of bad faith," i.e., individual blame, is other people's just desserts.

Closer to home, where one knows more of the surrounding facts, it is difficult to get by with general formulas. In regard to gypsies in Norway, for instance, Elster claims that "the only thing that prevents them from a life of regular work and schooling is their own attitude towards such things" (212). Is this not what the Chinese say about Malays or the Japanese about Koreans or Caucasian Americans about African Americans? Is Elster blaming the victim when he says that "they like to be free, to travel and not to have to make plans for the future"? Is this the real truth? Or is this a moving picture of "pickaninnies" as lazy and carefree with nary a thought for the morrow?

Norms and Interests

Norms and interests need not operate in separate spheres. Both are worked out in social interaction as individuals seek to support their way of life. Alan Fiske's understanding of the development of sociological and anthropological theory enables him to relate "norms" to similar terms useful for different types of analysis:

> When a *goal* varies as a function of situation and differs consistently among individuals, we call it a *motive*, but when the same goal is consistent and widely shared we call it a *value*. When we observe a shared goal from the point of view of its functions for the collectivity, we call it a *norm*, and when individuals insist that they and others must pursue it, we call it a *moral standard*. When people justify the legitimacy of a social system with reference to such a purpose, we speak of *ideology*.[18]

Motives, norms, morals, values, objectives, and ideologies are related concepts applied differently. There is no need, therefore, to treat individual- and social-level explanations as incompatible when they involve the same

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sort of considerations albeit at different levels of analysis. It is separating the individual from the society, instead of treating both as different sides of the same coin, in my opinion, that creates explanatory difficulties.

The separation between the micro (individual) and the macro (social, organizational) levels of explanation is artificial. So is the continuing cry to join the micro to the macro, for they are already joined in practice. If the individual is viewed as a social creature, influenced by as well as influencing existing patterns of social relations, then the relationship between the individual and the social is reciprocal, the pattern being constructed by while influencing the individuals whose behavior constitute its relationships.

NOTES

1. See Mary Douglas, "Cultural Bias," in Douglas, *In the Active Voice* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 183–254; id., *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1970); and Michael Thompson, Richard Ellis, and Aaron Wildavsky, *Cultural Theory* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990).
2. See, for instance, Israel Kirzner, *Competition and Entrepreneurship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).
3. From his table of contents can be compiled a list of the topics Elster covers: Mechanisms, Desires and Opportunities, Rational Choice, When Rationality Fails, Myopia and Foresight, Selfishness and Altruism, Emotions, Natural and Social Selection, Reinforcement, Unintended Consequences, Equilibrium, Social Norms, Collective Action, Bargaining, Social Institutions, Social Changes.
4. In Elster's own words, "To explain social institutions and social change is to show how they arise as the result of the action and interaction of individuals. This view, often referred to as methodological individualism, is in my view trivially true" (13). Trivially true means obvious, but not, as the reader will see, to me.
5. My own view is that Marx and neo-Marxists erred in two fundamental ways: (1) their lack of an organization theory of that exclusive hierarchy, the Communist party, led them to both underestimate its severity against external forces and its weakness against its own subunits; and (2) the fact that their assumptions-cum-descriptions of capitalism and its state-society relations fit communist states with command economies much better. That is why each and every one of Marx's predictions about capitalism have come true under communism. See John Clark and Aaron Wildavsky, *The Moral Collapse of Communism* (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies Press, 1990), and Clark and Wildavsky, "Chronicle of a Collapse Foretold: How Marx Predicted the Demise of Communism

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(Although He Called It 'Capitalism')," in Martin Krygier, ed., *Marxism and Political Power: Reflections after the Collapse of Communism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi Publishing House, forthcoming).

6. See Aaron Wildavsky, "Choosing Preferences By Constructing Institutions: A Cultural Theory of Preference Formation," *American Political Science Review* 81, no. 1 (March 1987): 3–21.
7. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), 378. The same could be said, in my view, of all social science and history.
8. Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, *Cultural Theory*.
9. Those who thoughtlessly recite Keynes's admonition to economists that in the long run we are all dead treat life as if it ends with individuals. No hierarchist would believe that.
10. *Turning Point 2000*, March 1991: 3 (emph. added). *Turning Point 2000* is a twice yearly newsletter published in Oxon, England by James Robertson.
11. While listening to National Public Radio (July 9, 1990), I heard a discussion of Western nations providing technical aid to the Soviet Union. The example given was better storage facilities for grain, a large part of which spoils before reaching the market. To an individualist, such statements miss the point. What is needed are incentives so that Soviets who operate storage facilities will themselves want to seek out the most cost-effective technology.
12. Arthur L. Stinchcombe, "Comment," *Rationality and Society* 2, no. 2 (April 1990): 215.
13. See Pin Yathay, *L'utopie meurtriere* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1980); the review of this book by Ferenc Fehér, *Telos* no. 56 (Summer 1983): 193–205; and Karl D. Jackson, ed., *Rendezvous with Death: Democratic Kampuchea, 1975–1978*, forthcoming.
14. Friedrich Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951); and id., *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944).
15. John C. Calhoun, *A Disquisition on Government* (New York: Political Science Classics, 1947), 5–6.
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*Jeffrey Friedman**

ACCOUNTING FOR POLITICAL PREFERENCES: CULTURAL THEORY VS. CULTURAL HISTORY

Liberalism sanctifies the values chosen by the sovereign individual. This tends to rule out criticisms of an individual's "preference" for one value over another by, ironically, establishing a deterministic view of the self that protects the self's desires from scrutiny. Similarly, rational choice approaches to social theory begin with previously determined individual preferences and focus on the means by which they are pursued, concentrating on the results rather than the sources of people's values.

A striking new attempt to go behind the liberal and rational-choice starting point in order to understand political preferences is found in Aaron Wildavsky's Cultural Theory. Yet Cultural Theory does not facilitate the criticism of preferences, because its understanding of them is fundamentally liberal. Even while rejecting methodological individualism, Cultural Theory's monocausally social theory of preference formation retains in a new guise the liberal preservation of preferences from criticism by reestablishing a deterministic view of the formation of values, leading it to share with liberalism an ahistorical view of their origins.

Aaron Wildavsky, formerly the president of the American Political Science Association, has for several years advanced a sweeping answer to the

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question of what accounts for people's political values—the question of political culture.[1] His cultural theory (henceforth capitalized to distinguish it from competitors) is designed to overcome the tendency of rational choice theory to make value "preferences into a *deus ex machina* that drops from the sky uncaused."[2] In *Cultural Theory* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), Wildavsky and coauthors Michael Thompson and Richard Ellis set forth in systematic detail an explanation of the causal factors they think lie behind political preferences. The authors ask: "Where do preferences come from? This is the great unanswered question in the social sciences. Indeed, for the most part, it is the great unasked question" (55).

It is also the great unasked question in the societies usually studied by social scientists—liberal societies—even though (or rather, because) liberalism is dedicated to the satisfaction of people's preferences. Both democratic polities and market economies gratify the preferences of the choosing individual. This might lead one to expect that in liberal thought, the source of individual preferences is understood to be valuable. But while the source of preferences is indeed valued, it is not understood by liberalism at all; liberalism does not even seem interested in the matter. To grasp the importance of Wildavsky's project, then—and, it will turn out, to judge his success in pursuing it—we need to get a better handle on the paradoxical combination of reverence and indifference accorded by liberal economics, politics and culture to people's "preferences."

The Myth of Liberal Neutrality

Liberal societies display little interest in the sources of individual values because of the pretense of liberal neutrality. The liberal legal framework, by allowing freedom of action to the individual, treats the possible ends of such action as essentially interchangeable. Hence the liberal commonplace that what is legal is an entirely different matter from what is moral: considered from the legal standpoint, it is impossible to distinguish among good and bad ends.

But liberalism holds that legally allowing people to do whatever they want (as long as they respect the equal right of others to do what *they* want) does not prevent them from voluntarily selecting moral codes which rule out certain legally allowed individual actions, or which rule in others. Indeed, "true" morality is said to depend on individual freedom: what merit, after all, lies in doing what one is compelled to do? The moral thing to do is in many cases what is *not* required by law, and in many others involves refraining from doing what *is* legally permitted. It is moral theory, then, not political theory that should be concerned with the sources of individual preferences in liberal societies.

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The reason liberal neutrality is a myth is that in order to establish the value of neutrality in the first place, one must deploy reasoning that ends up undermining the moral/legal distinction on which neutrality rests. For to adhere to the value of neutrality is patently to take a moral position: it is to say that it is *better* for the law to allow people to do what is "morally wrong" than to force them to do what is morally right.

This non-neutrality is obvious when the rationale of individual liberty is not intrinsic, but is based on the good consequences liberty (arguably) produces: prosperity, social peace, the development of talents, cultural efflorescence, happiness, and the like. For such rationales entail the judgment that the individual immorality tolerated in a liberal regime is a price worth paying for the good consequences of individual freedom. Thus, a consequentialistically defended liberal legal order makes no claim to indifference among values: it places the good consequences of liberalism at the top of a value hierarchy and justifies non-interference with immoral individual actions on the ground that the negative consequences of interference would outweigh the benefits.

But it is just as true that we forego neutrality when we prize liberty as an intrinsic good rather than as a means to good consequences. For if one's right to do what is wrong inherently deserves legal protection, then in what sense is it morally wrong? The rationale for the "neutral," non-coercive legal framework demands loyalty to a different form of moral reasoning than that which would be required to establish the voluntary moral codes that are supposed to flourish within that framework.[3] For a libertarian legal framework—one that justifies individual liberty not as a means to other ends, but as an end in itself—requires a definition of morality that is concerned not with the *justice of actions* but with the *authority of individuals*. When individual authority is valued for its own sake, the appropriateness of actions is determined *not by judgments about the worth of actions* of the sort generated by voluntary moral codes, *but according to the single criterion of the freedom of the actor.* Rather than recognizing that values are answers to the question of *what one should do*, they must be seen as pertaining to the question of who has *the right to decide* what one should do. The first question inherently conflicts with the second, since an answer to the first question would establish obligations that would supersede the freedom of sovereign decision makers. Far from being neutral, then, individual sovereignty derogates every value but one: that of freedom.

Thus, attempts to enforce a given standard of appropriate behavior are seen in libertarian societies as mere efforts to "impose one person's values on another." Implicit in this expression are two paradoxically related assumptions: (1) that the only objective value is that of individual choice, and (2) that whatever an individual chooses is merely subjective and therefore should

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not be imposed on others. Thus, at the same time that individual choice is elevated to the highest place on the scale of values, it is denigrated as being a mere exercise of what economists like to call "individual tastes." What accounts for this paradox is the peculiar nature of freedom as an intrinsic value. To value freedom as an end in itself means delegating the choice-making function of morality to the free agent, which in turn means approving of whatever he or she decides to value. But this blanket approval means that whether the individual chooses x or not-x is equally satisfactory—i.e., that the choice between x and not-x is *arbitrary*; the moral question ("what to do?") has been evaded.

Freedom is properly the description of an agent *before* he or she chooses a value, when he or she is at liberty to value what he or she wills. Once a value is selected, however, this freedom is curtailed: the chooser now aims toward one value and away from its competitors. Seen in this way, morality is inherently at odds with freedom: freedom is the multiplication of options, morality is the narrowing of them by the selection of one over the others. Even valuing freedom itself restricts freedom: for the freedom-lover loves freedom for everyone, not just for him- or herself. Thus, actions that deprive others of their equal liberties are forbidden by libertarianism. Only an extreme, Stirnerite libertarianism that is restricted to oneself, allowing one to do whatever one wants, even at the expense of others' freedom, imposes no restrictions on one's liberty of choice. But for precisely this reason, such complete individual liberty is *amoral*: it embodies not values, but the total absence of them.

But aside from equal freedom of action, libertarian liberalism implicitly denies the legitimacy of any other moral values, since what it values is not values but the pre-moral condition of freedom to select among them. To move beyond this condition into the constrained state of having chosen a value must be considered by a libertarian (were logical rigor to prevail) to be arbitrary, for if there were some non-arbitrary rationale for choosing x over not-x, it would make no sense to place greater intrinsic value on the freedom to choose not-x than on the actual choice of x. Antinomianism is built into the very logic behind liberal neutrality.

Libertarian Determinism

If in libertarian parlance judgments of right and wrong become expressions of "mere individual preferences," then the one possible form of libertarian morality is egalitarian and individualistic: the morality that decries inequality and oppression and is aggrieved at the imposition of one person's arbitrary preferences upon another. But by its very nature, this morality does not serve the function of directing the choice of preferences:

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it views as at best presumptuous, at worst oppressive, the notion that a person *should* choose one thing rather than another, since this notion shifts attention back from the question of individual authority to that of the appropriateness of actions, undermining the supremacy of freedom over other values. It is to the mysterious realm of *taste- or preference-formation* that what was formerly the question of morality—what should one *do* with one's freedom?—is relegated by libertarianism.

This accounts for the popularity of the notion that "there is no accounting for tastes." If tastes *could* be accounted for, they would stop serving the function of justifying the freedom to pursue them indiscriminately. If we could say that somebody's preferences originate in a biographically or historically explicable misunderstanding or mythology, then such preferences could be criticized and, if there were no countervailing anti-paternalistic considerations (such as the tendency of paternalism to backfire), we could intervene to prevent actions based on those preferences. The field would be open to a comparative genealogy of preferences, with all the potential that would hold for mutual criticism and (in the absence of consequentialist anti-paternalist considerations) intervention. But if tastes cannot be accounted for, they cannot very well be challenged—or changed; the challenger or changer must be seen as attempting merely to "impose his or her tastes on others."

The same holds true for one's internal moral dialogue. Rather than doing what another tells me to do, libertarianism frees me to do what I want. But in this condition of freedom, how do I decide what "I" want? Certainly not by telling myself what I *should* want—which would be as restrictive of my all-important liberty as it would be for *you* to tell me what I should want. Instead, I ask myself what I *do*—already—want. Life becomes a quest for self-fulfilment, where the "self" consists of whatever preferences are sufficiently familiar that they seem *natural.*

It is at this juncture that the greatest paradox of libertarian liberalism arises, for a doctrine that began with the goal of individual liberty ends up binding the individual in as ironclad a determinism as the most implausible mechanistic or Marxist reductionism. Classical determinism attributed our every thought to the forces of "nature"; vulgar Marxism similarly decreed that one's preferences were determined by the hard reality of one's class interests. In both cases, preferences were held to be determined by forces outside of the individual. The upshot was to make it fruitless to criticize somebody's views; why waste one's breath arguing with a person who is but the plaything of exogenously determinative forces?

Libertarianism rests implicitly on an *endogenous* determinism, which just as effectively as the exogenous variety stops one (let alone others) from *criticizing* oneself, i.e. from accounting for one's tastes in order to consider

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the possibility of changing them, rather than merely expressing them. For according to endogenous determinism, there is a given self buried within, a fact that can be described, as can a natural law, but one that cannot, as can artificial laws, be *explained*. Gravity, atoms, the forces of nature are just unchangeably *there*: that is what the liberal self is like. (By contrast, laws—or "preferences"—devised by human beings could, by virtue of their artificiality, be historically contextualized, explained, questioned and altered.)

This naturalistic conception of the self still allows us to analyze why our selves act *irrationally*, i.e., in ways that frustrate rather than achieve what we *want*. But it does not allow us to analyze those wants themselves, for they express one's personal essence (unless one's wants are *violent*—i.e., unless they violate the single norm of egalitarian individualism, by threatening the one thing sacred: free selves, including one's own). One may speculate that this explains the popular enthusiasm for the reductionist side of Freudianism in the most libertarian nation on earth, the United States—that is to say, the Freudianism which provides a scientific nomenclature and a comforting exegesis of the determinants of neurotic values, safely attributing these sources of preference to the predetermined world of childhood. As for *therapeutic* Freudianism, which might be thought to be anti-deterministic in its promise to re-empower the will in facing down the misshapen drives of the "self," its inability to produce "results" may be its secret strength: for this failure means that the legitimacy lent by the therapist's devotion to lovingly unearthing, describing and categorizing one's self is not tarnished by the possibility that this lengthy and expensive process will end in a violation of the integrity of that self—i.e., in any fundamental *change* in it.

By shunting off the moral questions, questions of value and of the criteria of choice, to the black box of the inner self, libertarianism frees the individual of moral responsibility, which is relegated to the "spontaneous" action of the "personality." For most people, this may be enough to fend off the unsettling consequences of the destruction of traditional values brought on by science and by the instability of modern life—especially when they are helped in avoiding these consequences by the Freud who reduces deviant value choices to arcane "complexes." But anyone with a modicum of self-awareness understands that there is no spontaneous "there" in there—that one's actions are in large measure susceptible to rational control. This realization threatens to reburden the individual with the responsibility to choose values. Could it be that psychotherapy then saves the day, relieving some of the most sensitive of modern souls by fascinating them with the intricacies of their childhood-determined selves, no matter how instrumentally irrational the exercise proves to be?

Be that as it may, the logic of libertarianism tells against wondering

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whether one should *not* do what one "wants" to do; instead, the libertarian self throws up his or her hands and says, against the brute fact of his or her wants: "That's me; that's what I prefer; who am I to interfere? My task is but to catalogue and satisfy my personality (unless it frustrates or endangers the pursuit of 'its' preferences or those of other selves, in which case I must try to repair it)." Indeed, one's integrity comes to be identified by liberalism not, as in classical and medieval thought, as the ability of one's reason to *overcome* one's tastes and preferences, but as the ability to be "true to oneself" by plumbing the depths of and catering to those preferences, i.e. to one's "identity."

Libertarianism vs. Cultural Criticism

Lest the picture of one's choice-making inner self as a black box seem unrelated to libertarianism, consider the most elementary non-consequentialist justification of the free market: "The market sells people what they want; who are we to interfere?" The result is that when libertarians allow themselves to overcome their diffidence about inquiring into people's wants, it is only to defend *whatever* people want on the ground that it is freely chosen. The typical libertarian cultural posture, then, combines opposition to any restrictions on free choice with an indiscriminate defense of whatever results—whether what results is the culture of the freely choosing producers of the avant-garde or that of the freely choosing consumers of pop. To select either horn of this dilemma is, again, to put the authority of the sovereign individual above judgments of value. And, in turn, that means consigning the question of what sovereign individuals *should* choose to the unanalyzable realm of tastes and preferences.

Now consider the similarities between the logic of cultural libertarianism and that of multiculturalism. Rhetorically, at least, both seek the one and only libertarian goal: equal self-actualization. Both would agree, moreover, that interference with one's preferences constitutes oppression; so the purpose of education must be to serve, not to shape our tastes. In principle,[4] then, the only difference between multiculturalists and libertarians lies in where they locate the determined self who is the source of our preferences: in individuated or in shared identities. Libertarians tend not to notice, though, that beyond this difference multiculturalists are demanding that education respond to its *market*, i.e. to the pre-existing taste of its consumers for appreciative attention toward what they take to constitute their deepest personal identity: the denial of their equal liberty by modern society.

For both libertarians and multiculturalists, then, the normative starting point is the analytical stopping point: it only makes sense to value uncritically the tastes that are served by the market and by multicultural educa-

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tion if they express the irreducible and uncriticizable essence of the individual. Hence the false radicalism of both libertarianism and multiculturalism. Sociologically, both take for granted that what democratic, commercial society values most highly—one's unique individual identity—is indeed sacred and uncriticizable. What could be more bourgeois? Logically, they both cater to people's current preferences.[5] What could be more conservative?

What would be truly radical would be to *challenge*, rather than uncritically to accept, the equation of freedom with identity by going behind it in order to ferret out its artificiality, its non-givenness. This would, in the case of the market, mean studying the origins of consumerism and of the particular values on which it depends; that is part of what sociology and anthropology do. It is a research program of great interest to consequentialist liberals and "postlibertarians," since it bears on the question of whether *the cultural consequences of capitalism* are good or bad: Does capitalism elevate or degrade our preferences? Is its multiplication of desires compensated for by its multiplication of the means for satisfying them? And so on.

In the case of education, ironically, true radicalism would mean studying the history of Dead White European Males—not in order to worship it, canonize it, or even necessarily to affirm it, but in order to question it, and by so doing, to open to criticism the contemporary "preference" that makes the denial of our equal freedom to do whatever we want seem to be definitive of our identities. For it is in the history of Western civilization that the origins of modern libertarianism—and thus of multiculturalism itself—must be sought.

Theory vs. History

For some reason, however, it is not to history that Wildavsky et al. turn in their search for the sources of our preferences. Instead, they look to theory. Specifically, they adopt from anthropologist Mary Douglas a fivefold classification of all human beings as either *"hierarchists," egalitarians, individualists, fatalists*, or *autonomists*. These cultural predispositions are rooted in eternal "pattern[s] of social relationships" (*Cultural Theory*, 1): the first four worldviews correspond to the only viable "ways of life" that are possible in association with other people (3), while autonomism represents withdrawal from society altogether.

Each of the four social ways of life results from a different combination of two possible dimensions of interpersonal interaction: "group," or the extent to which one joins "with others in 'common residence, shared work, shared resources and education'" (5, quoting Mary Douglas); and

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"grid," or "the degree to which an individual's life is circumscribed by externally imposed prescriptions" (*ibid.*). In turn, each of the ways of life derived from the different combinations of grid and group carries with it a set of cultural biases that serve to justify it against the other ways of life. Thus, "strong group boundaries coupled with minimal prescriptions" (6) yield an egalitarian way of life, and egalitarianism as a cultural preference is the defense of strong boundaries and minimal prescriptions, a defense carried out by lauding group membership but deploring the inequality that would inhere in granting some group members authority over others. By contrast, when strong group boundaries are combined with differential power among group members, allowing a tight grid of constraints to be imposed on individual behavior, the result is a hierarchical way of life and a cultural preference for inegalitarian authoritarianism. In turn, weak grid and weak group—minimal prescriptions and an attenuated sense of membership—make for individualism as a cultural norm. And weak group boundaries in the presence of strong behavioral prescriptions create fatalists, resigned to being controlled by others but feeling no social ties to them. Finally, there are those who withdraw "from coercive or manipulative social involvement altogether. This is the way of life of the *hermit*" (7, emph. in original), who prefers autonomy.

Cultural Theory provides a wealth of important insights, especially concerning social science methodology. Explicitly, at least, the authors strike a much-needed balance between naïve, rationalistic versions of methodological individualism and the self-contradictory (if darkly appealing) extreme functionalism characteristic of some forms of Marxism. Against atomistic naïveté, Wildavsky et al. notice that people are not always, or even ever, so self-aware that they fully understand why they believe or "prefer" what they do. But the authors do not, like endogenous determinists, stop their inquiry at that point, refusing to probe the sources of people's preferences. They intend to go behind the back of the preference-determining "self" by exploring the cultural influences on individual preferences, by which they mean influences generated by social ways of life and, in particular, influences that may be unintentionally selected for because they serve the function of contributing to the survival of those ways of life.

Yet the authors' social functionalism does not (again at the explicit level) proceed to an exogenous determinism so extreme that it would not allow the possibility of transcending the social influences on one's preferences. Consequently, the authors avoid the self-negating posture of those who declare that our views are *inevitably and totally* the products of our social environment—a declaration that leaves unexplained how one can be sure of this view, which must itself be environmentally generated.

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Stopping short of that point still allows, however, for admitting a large degree of environmental influence. Instead of a strict reduction of culture to social relations, the authors propose that such relations make some ideas "seem more reasonable" (37) to those engaged in them than others. The importance of this formulation cannot be understated. Unlike a strict determinism by class interests, it preserves the possibility of criticizing the views that give comfort to one's way of life, while allowing observers to find correlations between certain ways of life and the prevalence of corresponding views when people fail to be self-critical. One could use this procedure to argue, for instance, that the modern libertarian relativism of tastes and preferences seems reasonable to participants in societies in which economic and political choice-making is the stuff of everyday life: a much more plausible sociology of bourgeois ideology than Marx's exclusively interest-based explanation, and one that leaves room for answering the separate, historical question of how that ideology *originated*.

Unfortunately, however, this is nothing like what Cultural Theory does. Since the five ways of life with which it deals are theoretically rather than empirically generated, they do not capture the particular sociological formation of modern industrial society. Consequently, the links between the ways of life and the cultures postulated by Cultural Theory are spurious. Yet the authors do, along the way, accurately describe many of the characteristic preferences of modern egalitarians and individualists, especially. This is made possible by the fact that operationally, the five ways of life play very little role in grounding the authors' concrete descriptions of contemporary culture.

What the ways of life do provide is an implausible means of universalizing the authors' cultural insights to all times and places. The direct consequence of the authors' decision to present their interesting cultural research in the guise of a universally applicable, socially based theory of culture is to reify contemporary cultural tropes into determining ways of life, thereby insulating those tropes from the very criticism that sound cultural analysis would allow.

The Poverty of Theory

These problems are reflected in the book's striking lack of concrete evidence for the relationship between ways of life and cultural biases. Admittedly, *Cultural Theory* is intended as a prologue to future research. But while we can expect that Cultural Theory will be able to guide and analyze survey research on contemporary opinions,[6] I shall argue below that this is because empirically, Cultural Theory is thoroughly grounded in

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contemporary politics—and contemporary politics alone. Its hold on such a narrow slice of reality is what is ultimately responsible for *Cultural Theory*'s utter *ahistoricism.*

It is strange that in a book which claims to provide a framework for redescribing all of human cultural history, the focus is so abstract. Part one spins out the theoretical implications of Douglas's grid-group model, as explicated in the Introduction. Part two runs through the methodological inadequacies of past cultural theorists. Only in the concluding part three is the subject the empirical reality of cultures, and even here, as we shall see, the authors are reticent to do much more than dispute previous theorists' portrayals of culture (e.g. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba's analysis of contemporary political cultures). All of this preoccupation with other cultural theories seems to distract the authors from the question of why theory (in the sense of an always-applicable model) is necessary in the first place: what would be wrong with accounting for culture as legions of historians have already done, not as the product of a handful of timeless social causes, but as the outcome of the interplay of a variety of causes—not only social but political, economic, intellectual and psychological—with the accumulated contingencies of the past?

One cannot help but ask this question ever more insistently as one vainly searches *Cultural Theory*, particularly part three, for concrete evidence linking the prevalence and distribution of the five ways of life to the cultural biases Cultural Theory purports to explain. Where, for instance, are the colonies of egalitarianism that are supposed to be the source of egalitarian cultural preferences? We are referred only to unspecified "self-sufficient communard[s]" (7). The other "flesh-and-blood vignettes" that are meant to "illustrate each of the five types" have slightly more specificity, but only in a stereotypical sense, and this deficiency is never more than perfunctorily remedied. Embodying fatalism is an imagined Victorian factory hand; an unspecified Hindu villager stands for hierarchy; and individualism is represented by an unnamed "self-made Victorian manufacturer" (*ibid.*), as well as by Julian Simon's book, *The Ultimate Resource*,[7] and by the novels of Ayn Rand (8). Can these stereotypes really account for a substantial portion of human culture through the ages?

Perhaps they are not meant to? Like Weber's ideal types, could they be intended as heuristic abstractions from reality that, depending on the results of historical research, may or may not find any, or many, actual exemplars?

Unfortunately, there is little doubt that the authors intend their formal schema not as an ideal typology with no necessary relation to the distribution of phenomena in a particular instance, but as applicable to all societies in human history. Thus, they contend that "each way of life

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needs each of its rivals, either to make up for its deficiencies, or to exploit, or to define itself against." (4). Since the ways of life are inseperable from the cultures they spawn, one should find the five cultures, too, exemplified in any and every society. Wherever we look, we should be able to find the various ways of life, each generating the corresponding culture, engaged in a never-ending struggle with the others to justify itself. In that case, why don't the authors give us examples of non-modern, non-Western societies in which the five cultures actually did coexist, or of modern Western societies in which the various cultures actually spring from five different ways of life? Instead, they resort to stereotypical illustrations of the alleged social bases of the cultural struggle or, at best, to occasional uses of one or another of the five ways of life to explain scattered cultural episodes.

One of the few premodern (if incomplete) examples, the basis of half a chapter in part three, comes from Edward Banfield's *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*,[8] which makes what seems (to a non-anthropologist) to be a strong case that fatalism as a culture emerged from the way of life of a southern Italian village. Yet this example omits the egalitarians, individualists, hierarchs and autonomists who are supposed to always and everywhere compete with the fatalists.

The other half of chapter 12, and the only other detailed examination of a premodern culture, is drawn largely from Lucien Pye's studies of China. And Pye does find that, for instance, the traditional Chinese bureaucracy fostered a culture that "glorified the established authority of the better educated and rationalized their claims of superiority on the basis of possessing specialized wisdom" (quoted at 228). Similarly, the authors can indeed point to three other Chinese cultures that competed with hierarchy. But another lacuna comes into view: the premodern cultural ideals seem qualitatively different from their modern variants. Yes, there was a deeply rooted " 'entrepreneurial spirit' " in ancient Chinese culture (229, quoting Robert Scalapino), but this is hardly equivalent to the individualistic Reaganite belief in equal opportunity for everyone to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. And Chinese egalitarianism, which according to Pye "glorified the rebel and trusted magical formulas to transform economic and social reality" (quoted at *ibid.*), hardly seems comparable to the modern version of what the authors claim is always and everywhere essentially the same cultural phenomenon. But if modern Western and premodern Chinese individualism and egalitarianism are fundamentally dissimilar, then perhaps there is something about modernity or the Western tradition that has either altered them or—more likely—has created what we know as individualism and egalitarianism out of quite different materials?

This would be bad enough for Cultural Theory, but it is even worse if

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Chinese and Western individualism and egalitarianism do *not* differ from each other in kind. In the last paragraph of the book, the authors ask what would count as evidence against Cultural Theory. Their answer:

> Most damaging would be a demonstration that values are little constrained by institutional relationships. If the same cultural biases thrived in dissimilar social contexts or, conversely, if dissimilar biases existed in similar social contexts, then our faith in cultural theory would be greatly weakened. (273)

But surely that is exactly what is shown if Chinese and Western individualism and egalitarianism are similar in kind, as the authors must contend (in order to preserve the universality of the five cultures). For there could hardly be more dissimilar social contexts than, on the one hand, the Chinese bureaucracies that spawned "individualistic" " 'prospering notable[s] who . . . combined good luck, quick wits, and hard work to advance' " themselves (229, quoting Pye), or the Chinese villages that gave birth to "egalitarian" peasant rebellions; and, on the other hand, the urbanized, industrialized, atomized market societies inhabited by modern Western individualists and modern Western egalitarians. Here is the first reason for the paucity of systematic historical evidence in favor of Cultural Theory: in historically recent Western society, cultural ideals are, for the most part, quite unrelated to variations in social way of life.

The Autonomy of Modern Culture

The fact is that modern "egalitarianism" thrives in the same cosmopolitan social context as does modern "individualism"—which is also, for that matter, the social context of many "hierarchists" and "fatalists." If egalitarians lived on communes (as in the authors' stereotype), there could be some argument here. Indeed, Ellis and Wildavsky have claimed that the organization of pre-Civil War abolitionists in the United States into small, egalitarian social groups is confirmation of the predictions of Cultural Theory.[9] But it was not the small social groups that led to the abolitionist ideology, but the ideology that—sometimes—led to the formation of the groups.[10] Hence it was quite possible to be an abolitionist while not participating in such a group—just as it is possible now for egalitarians to participate in a competitive, individualistic society while deploring it. Cultural Theory's depiction of the egalitarian mindset describes not just the worldview of the minuscule number of egalitarians raised on communes, but also that of the hundreds of millions who are raised in nuclear families, who themselves found such families, and who are full participants in market economies—even while they protest the

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plight of the homeless and unemployed and agitate for egalitarian policies to rectify those situations.

Egalitarianism plays perhaps the central role in the modern applications Wildavsky makes of Cultural Theory,[11] yet neither it nor its "adversary," individualism, can be correlated with a way of life that the vast majority of the adherents of both cultures do not share. Hence the fact that one finds among contemporary egalitarians the wealthy businesspeople and professionals who, if Cultural Theory were valid, should be individualists, but who actually underwrite liberal foundations and political causes. Then there are the "media elites"—the journalists, reporters, filmmakers, scriptwriters, songwriters, movie stars and other entertainers—most of whom are participants in highly competitive, profit-making businesses but most of whom nevertheless, Wildavsky himself has argued, display strong egalitarian biases.[12] Indeed, historically speaking, bourgeois society has always produced not only its champions but its most dedicated enemies: the egalitarian Marxes, Foucaults and deep ecologists as well as the individualistic Samuel Smileses, Herbert Spencers and Horatio Algers.

By the same token, what of the government employees— teachers, civil servants, welfare caseworkers, political appointees—who should, if way of life determines culture, be "hierarchists," yet who have often entered government service out of a belief in the social responsibility of all people to help others, and who promote *egalitarian* causes by means of their hierarchically organized power? On the other hand, the ranks of bureaucrats also include those responsible for throwing the American trucking and airline industries open to "individualistic" competition via deregulation; how can Cultural Theory explain that? And what does it make of the working and lower classes who, victimized by the unpredictable operation of the business cycle, ought to be fatalists but instead favor egalitarianism? Cultural Theory is as ill equipped as vulgar Marxism to make these various cultural superstructures fit the foundations supposely lain by social bases.

It may be that there are only four or five basic types of social order. But even if we concede that before the advent of mass literacy and the dissolution of strong group boundaries by urbanization, these social types could explain most cultural phenomena, that is surely not the contemporary situation. Now culture has assumed an autonomy which dictates that even if we could trace the roots of "the" five cultural types to five premodern ways of life, there is virtually no correspondence any more between the cultural biases that have subsequently evolved and contemporary social forms.

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The Uniqueness of Egalitarian Individualism

But it is not even likely that that concession is warranted. If the first source of *Cultural Theory*'s paucity of evidence is the failure of modern ideas to correspond to any differential social bases, the second problem is that in premodern societies, where there was admittedly less cultural autonomy, two of the five cultures—egalitarianism and individualism—were largely, if not entirely, absent.

There have, of course, been many premodern egalitarian *societies*—for instance, the Essenes and monastics, and the chieftainless bands that predated the development of organized government. But egalitarianism as a cultural ideal is a very different matter. Where, one wants to know, can it be found outside of the modern West? The issue is complicated somewhat by Douglas's grid-group schema, which entails that egalitarians restrict their doctrine to an exclusive group. This makes cultural egalitarianism seem rather common in premodern settings. But modern egalitarian ideals are *not* restricted to one's group, making them dissimilar to premodern egalitarianism by the terms of Cultural Theory itself. One of the greatest problems in the authors' usually insightful treatment of contemporary culture is, indeed, its failure to acknowledge that modern egalitarianism is *universalistic*—presumably since this would conflict with the notion that it is congruent with the way of life of bounded premodern groups.

Much the same can be said of individualism. As a social phenomenon (i.e., weak grid, weak group), individualism is evident in antiquity among the hoi polloi against whom Plato directed his critique of materialism and the indulgence of the appetites. Indeed, wherever there has been long-distance trade, one can imagine traders who were detached enough from social hierarchies that they were able to concern themselves with the pursuit of profit and with the least possible encumbrance from any outside authority. But such self-interested attitudes were rarely, if ever, translated into a *universalized* individualistic ideal before the advent of modernity.

The similarity of the cases of individualism and egalitarianism is, of course, due to the fact that as ideals, they are inseparable. Indeed, one reason previous cultural analysts have insisted on a premodern-modern dichotomy is that *equal individual freedom* as the highest ideal is so clearly a new and protean phenomenon. In *The Republic* one will find Socrates' disputants arguing for the primacy of self-interest, but not for individual rights or anything close to them.

For such ideals to emerge required the intervention of the notion of human equality as a positive good. This intervention probably came

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from Christianity, through the idea that each human soul is sacred because, like God, it is free to choose between good and evil. Undeniably, social phenomena must have paved the way for the spread of the egalitarian individualistic ideal. Among these was the decay of feudal hierarchy that preceded the epochal moment in the rise of egalitarian individualism: the advent of Protestantism.[13] Eventually, however, by the modern era, social and other factors had combined with the impact of Western religio-cultural teachings to produce an ideal that was plausible to people *regardless* of their social ways of life: the ideal of individual equality, which attributes equal moral worth and *equal moral authority* to all individuals per se.

"Individualists," the authors write, insist "that the best of all possible worlds is one in which each sovereign individual bids and bargains with every other. . . . Their great moral principle [is] equality of opportunity" (95). But if individualism is, as Cultural Theory claims, antagonistic to egalitarianism, why would an individualist favor the sovereignty of all individuals, rather than just his or her own? Why not advocate *in*equality of opportunity—a hierarchy with oneself on top? If we stick to abstractions, we might be able to escape this problem by attributing the individualist's universalism to a dim awareness that that is a more easily defended posture than Stirnerite egoism would be: in plain language, equality of opportunity is a better ideological tool than unvarnished selfishness. But the historical reality is that even the Victorian entrepreneurs who are supposed to embody extreme individualism were deeply religious and truly believed in the sanctity of all human beings, as shown by their commitment to philanthropy. One can see even in such stereotypical exemplars of individualism that it goes together with egalitarianism (however imperfectly they embodied the latter): individual rights inhere in every human being, while equality is a moral imperative only if the equals in question are individually valuable. Even John Galt would not dream of infringing on the equal rights of his competitors.

Regardless of whether one agrees that individualism is inextricable from egalitarianism or that they jointly emerged from Christianity, however, it should be clear that no alternative accounts of their emergence are available within Cultural Theory. For if, as it holds, individualism and egalitarianism are cultural constants, then they cannot have *emerged* at all: they must have been there from the beginning of human social life. This ahistorical picture of individualism and egalitarianism leaves us in the position of expecting to find John Galts and Karl Marxes populating ancient Athens or the Yanomamo villages of the Amazon. Incredibly, this is just what the authors do seem to expect.

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Back to Determinism

That is the apparent implication of their numerous discussions of the five cultures in jarringly contemporary terms, suggesting that they could essentially be reproduced in any era—as if affirmative action and opposition to "Big Government" are merely contemporary adaptations of eternal biases.

This ahistoricism comes out most clearly in the authors' attribution of distinctive views of the natural environment to the five types: not by means of a comparison of such views in several actual societies, modern and premodern, but via an abstract argument about how unidentified participants in the five ways of life *must* see nature, a discussion that derives its plausibility solely from its correspondence to the way many people in modern industrial society *do* see nature. Thus, the authors write that

> the idea of resource scarcity is useful to hierarchists, who can then proceed to allocate physical quantities by direct, bureaucratic means. Resource depletion is a useful belief for egalitarians, who can blame "the system" for exploiting nature, as it does people, and who can then try to get the authorities to change their inegalitarian life-style. The idea that resources are limited is rejected by the individualist because it implies that exchange will make people worse off (and should therefore be curtailed). . . . (62)

This is doubtless an acute assessment of why the contemporary left tends to be pro-environmentalism, the libertarian right, anti-. But it cannot explain the pro-industry attitudes of even relatively recent egalitarians like Marx. And trying to fit the nature-worshipping yet "futurist," pro-technology fascists and Nazis into the schema would be a Procrustean nightmare. This begins to tally the difficulties of applying the authors' argument merely to the last century of Western history—let alone to all of human history. (Should we expect that Mayan entrepreneurs, demanding the freedom to exploit nature, derided claims of resource scarcity as a priestly conspiracy designed to keep the political hierarchy in power?) Yet if they are to do any work in establishing the plausibility of Cultural Theory, the authors' generalizations must be intended as eternally valid analyses—which the slightest historical investigation would falsify.

The purpose of pointing out the ahistoricism of so much of *Cultural Theory* is not to suggest that its authors have done a bad job of applying Douglas's typology to the empirical data. They have done as well as anyone could. The problem lies in the very nature of their project: the ambition to create a *social theory* of culture rather than simply to do cultural history. This initial choice guaranteed an ahistorical outcome—unless the

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authors were to have developed a theory that interpreted history itself as being governed by socially generated laws of development. Since such an *historicism* is the position taken by most of the previous cultural theorists against whom Wildavsky et al. contrast themselves, one can see how the authors made their fateful turn away from *history*. Part two of the book is devoted to criticizing such previous cultural theorists as Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, Marx, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, and Parsons for postulating excessively general dicta about the historical growth of social specialization or about constant functional tendencies toward social stability. Their error was to attempt to formulate developmental laws; such laws must be overly general in order to be applied to the diversity of human history. Wildavsky et al., with Douglas's help, try to formulate meatier laws—but must virtually ignore history to do it.

At the end of their book, the authors take notice of this, raising the question of whether their theory implies that "history is irrelevant." They can only answer in the negative by pointing out that even by the lights of Cultural Theory, history "can tell us which means or instruments of policy are available and which ones will, based on the experience of these particular people, be seen as relevant to their circumstances" (272). But this is to admit that where the selection not of means but of ends—i.e. of preferences—is concerned, history *is* irrelevant.

Perhaps the ultimate source of the authors' ahistoricism is their allegiance to the sociological assumption that the only alternative to naïvely individualistic theories, which assume that individuals consciously deliberate about and freely choose their tastes, is to assert the primacy of social relations. This alternative may not be naïve, but it is surely arbitrary. On what basis can such empirical claims as that "social relations are the great teachers of human life" (56), that "the most basic desire of human beings [involves] how we wish to live with other people and others to live with us" (57), and that "what matters most to people is how they would like to relate to other people and how they would like others to relate to them" (97) be asserted as if they are a priori truths not worthy of investigation? Yet it is only by accepting such dogmas—thereby repeating the reactionary reflexes of nineteenth-century sociologists against equally dogmatic Enlightenment rationalism—that the authors can assume, with neither hesitation nor justification, that "social relations are sustained by generating preferences that in turn generate those social relations" (66), so that "notions of what is expected, what is valued, what is natural, what is just, and so on are given to us by our social relations" (207). When this is taken for granted and is combined with Douglas's typology of recurrent social forms, an ahistorical typology of recurrent cultural forms is sure to follow.

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Cultural analysis must by its very nature pay attention to the possibility of exogenous influences on individuals' cultural "choices"—their "tastes and preferences." But the questions of (1) the extent and (2) the nature of these influences cannot be answered before empirical investigation begins. Indeed, since determining the extent and nature of these influences is the purpose of empirical investigation, that task—i.e., cultural history—will be foreclosed if one decides beforehand on set answers to either question. The only thing one can say a priori is what it is necessary to say if writing history will be possible at all: that environmental determinism cannot be complete and ineluctable, or at least that we cannot believe that it is, since this would invalidate in advance the historian's own conclusions by making them the mere products of his or her own environment.

As mentioned, the authors explicitly avoid the trap of asserting in advance an answer to the question of the degree to which environment determines culture. But they are not so adroit when it comes to the question of the *source* of environmental determination: here they are convinced a priori that the answer must be one's social relations. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this vitiates their explicitly non-determinist methodology. If the answer to the question of the *source* of environmental determinations is unequivocally social, then do we not also have an a priori answer as to the *extent* of environmental influence— i.e., must it not be total?

To see how much this assumption narrows the scope of the possibilities that can then be uncovered by investigation, one need only note that it rules out religion as anything more than a social function, even though it is arguably just as basic to human beings that they are worried about their mortality as that they are engaged in social relations. But existential reflection can find no role in a monocausally social theory of culture, meaning that the urge for spiritual purity evident in hermits (and, for that matter, in egalitarian religious communities and in Jesus' teachings of brotherhood) is misinterpreted as an inexplicable desire to secede from social relationships per se (e.g. 65); in the parenthetical cases just mentioned, as a desire to reproduce egalitarian social relations for their own sake; or as stemming from attitudes toward nature that serve to defend social ways of life (e.g. 10,11).

If ways of life alone cause cultural biases, no middle term can mediate this causation so as to allow people independence enough to overcome their ways of life. Thus, any recognition of the mediating role played in transmitting traditions, values and assumptions by such *institutions* as families, organized religions, formal education, art, literature, cinema, television, and so on—any recognition, in short, of culture as anything but what inheres in the power relations of one's social group—is truncated in Cul-

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tural Theory, because to introduce cultural institutions into the picture would mean threatening the exclusive influence which Cultural Theory asserts is exercised on one's cultural predispositions by one's way of life. Once such institutions were acknowledged, it would be utterly absurd to overlook the *historical contingency* of the ideas they transmitted, i.e. their development out of *traditions* that—even if initially founded in social relations—subsequently take on a life of their own.

Thus, only to the degree that cultural institutions can be interpreted as mirroring ways of life can they be noticed by Cultural Theory, for instance by attributing New England Federalism to an authoritarian mode of child-rearing (236). But families do not just reproduce their power structures; they teach children notions about the way the world works and about the way it *should* work—i.e., political preferences—notions that vary not merely according to relations within the families themselves, but according to inherited religious and national doctrines and the variable life experience of parents. Similarly with what is taught by elementary and secondary schools, universities, churches, friends and co-workers, and the newspapers, magazines, books, movies, videos and sitcoms one daily encounters (which are in turn usually produced by well-educated, uncritical imbibers of the conventional wisdom of a historically particular time and place). But to see any of this would mean admitting that especially in modern societies, cultural ideals can be and usually are unrelated to social ways of life.

Cultural Theory's social monocausalism allows it to ignore the role of cultural institutions, i.e. of history. The two forms of ahistoricism that result, in turn, hide each other's deficiencies. After making the a priori assumption that there are five universal and essentially *invariant* socially caused cultural types (or four if withdrawal from society is not counted), one is free to run together evidence from all historical periods. This allows the conflation of evidence of primarily modern *cultural* forms, such as that regarding egalitarianism and individualism, with evidence of primarily premodern *social* forms, such as that regarding the attitudes of Chinese or Italian peasants.

Cultural Theory As a Mirror of Modernity

Thus, the authors' many suggestive observations about modern cultural biases (such as in the passage on natural resources quoted above), although formally attributed to social ways of life, are operationally quite independent of them. In the modern context which is the authors' primary arena of interest, "fatalism," "hierarchism," and especially "egalitarianism" and "individualism" actually serve as free-floating labels for the different types

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of values we constantly encounter in contemporary political discourse; only rarely (e.g. in Ellis and Wildavsky's interpretation of abolitionist associations) is more than nominal attention paid to whether these cultural biases are really linked to differences in the way those who hold the biases live. Thus, for example, Wildavsky does not link the egalitarianism of media elites to any peculiarities in their ways of life. Inasmuch as Cultural Theorists do produce plausible observations about modern culture, it is because their relentless ahistoricism allows them to use what are primarily premodern ways of life to fill in the social placeholders foisted on them by Douglas's typology.

The function of the ways of life is to give a social-scientific veneer to what one suspects *really* matters to the authors: the pluralization of the uniform rationality assumed by rational choice theory—which flattens our picture of partisan politics, reducing even ideology to the pursuit of a univocal "self-interest"—into a more variegated, and thus more realistic understanding of people's political interests.[14] It is from this pluralization that Cultural Theory derives its only plausibility. For the five cultures (or at least the four social cultures) are, if nothing else, close matches to contemporary political self-understandings.

This is particularly true in the United States, where a rhetorical commitment to private property and small government has seemed so prominent during the last twelve years. This historically contingent tradition, which identifies individual liberty with private property, finds its expression, of course, in Cultural Theory's "individualistic" construct. The other main element of the Reagan coalition, consisting of defenders of traditional Protestant morality, is of course supposed to be captured by "hierarchism." Liberals and leftists are "egalitarians." And the "underclass," which Wildavsky asserts "lives largely in the present,"[15] is rendered as "fatalistic." This fourfold division may mirror contemporary political alignments better than the conventional left-right dichotomy; but Cultural Theory then takes this comparative advantage overboard, transforming four blocs of contemporary American political opinion into timeless, placeless cultural universals. This not only renders the above-mentioned logical and historical similarities between the egalitarian premises of "individualism" and the individualistic premises of "egalitarianism" invisible, but if taken seriously, it would send us on a wild goose chase in search of peculiarly individualistic ways of life among libertarians and communal ways of life among egalitarians.

Thus, Cultural Theory's applicability to contemporary political contestants is bought at the price of obscuring their commonalities and their historical uniqueness. Just as in libertarianism the ahistorical "self" cannot have its preferences interrogated, in Cultural Theory *the preference for liber-*

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tarianism (i.e. for egalitarian individualism) *itself* cannot be interrogated: it is just *there*, an aspect of one of the universal ways of life. Contemporary relevance is purchased by historical obliviousness.

But if Cultural Theory does not tell us very much about where our culture came from, it does *illustrate* its peculiarity. For the authors derive Cultural Theory's "superior[ity]" from the fact that "both the grid and group dimensions measure social restrictions upon individual autonomy" (103). That the degree to which individual autonomy is restricted can unblinkingly be considered the most universally important aspect of society and culture is highly instructive about the ruling assumptions of the age. As another critic of Cultural Theory has written,

> Wildavsky's four-box matrix of cultural types illustrates something important about his own culture. The central issue addressed by this matrix is the trade-off between individual freedom and government authority. Indeed this issue has been a central point of concern in the Western political tradition. . . . But in other cultures, for instance, the Confucian, these issues are not juxtaposed as opposites or as obvious trade-offs. What we learn from Wildavsky is the central importance of the debate about freedom in his culture, and we can predict that consensus will often fracture along this fault line.[16]

In short, Cultural Theory is contemporaneously plausible because it is based on the libertarian premises that structure our politics. While before the advent of modernity, Western normative theorists asked how people should live—what they should prefer—libertarian liberals ask who should have the authority to decide how to live, i.e. who should have the power of autonomous choice: the equal individual or some hierarchy placed over him/her. This is exactly the question embodied in Douglas's typology. Cultural Theory responds to this insistent Western preoccupation with the distribution of power in the way that sociologists "prefer" to respond to it, that is, by asserting the power of society over the individual, rather than as economists prefer to respond to it, by asserting the autonomy of the individual over society. The sociological answer merely moves the question of "given" preferences back a level, from the individual to the group. If individual preferences are a *deus ex machina* in rational choice theory and in libertarianism, group preferences are the *deus ex machina* of Cultural Theory. In each case the starting point is a "natural fact": either the essence of the self or that of the group. And the consequences of these determinisms, too, are similar. In one case we are helpless victims of our ineffable tastes; in the other, of our social way of life.

Yet Cultural Theory cannot uphold a simple reduction of individual to group preferences; for this would leave no room for individuals to transcend their social contexts, and we have already seen that explicitly, this

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space is something the authors realize they must preserve. To account for changes in preferences, then, Cultural Theorists must somehow escape the exogenous determinism toward which they are implicitly committed. How do they accomplish this without falling back into the arbitrarily given, whimsically plastic "tastes" of rational choice theory?

From Value Irrationality to Instrumental Hyperrationalism

The answer is that the authors weld onto the socially determined body of Cultural Theory a rationalism as naïve as any produced by the Enlightenment. Thus, while the logical implication of a one-to-one correlation of cultural biases and social ways of life is that individuals are the passive recipients of socially functional preferences, Cultural Theory holds that individuals are somehow simultaneously active, self-conscious evaluators of socially given assumptions:

> The existence of competing ways of [social] organizing gives individuals knowledge of other possibilities, and the opportunity to observe how the people who live according to these other ways are doing. Individuals use their powers of reasoning to compare existing social arrangements with alternatives. Thus . . . in some of the most privileged enclaves that capitalist systems have produced, we find cliques (like "The Apostles" at prewar Cambridge) dedicated to moving their society in the opposite direction. (13)

Do the authors mean to suggest that the Apostles' Communism was a result of the careful study of socialist forms of social organization? Is it not far more likely that the pull exerted on them by leftist ideals was based not on comparative economic studies, but rather on training by Cambridge University to a deep appreciation of the finest egalitarian ideals of Western civilization?[17] But Cultural Theorists cannot entertain that possibility, because it does not involve the cultural defense of a given social way of life. The alternative to which they turn is solitary, self-conscious, rational individual deliberation. Cultural Theory thus attempts to fuse the extreme holism of the nineteenth century and the extreme individualism of the eighteenth:

> How does change ever occur? If ways of life are self-protecting, instructing people what to value, what to ignore and notice, shun and embrace, how is it that ways of life ever lose (or gain) adherents?
>
> Much the same way, we suggest, as scientific theories lose and gain adherents: the cumulative impact of successive anomalies or surprises. . . .
>
> Ways of life, like theories, cannot exclude reality altogether. As evidence

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> builds up against theories, or as ways of life do not pay off for adherents, doubts build up, followed by defections. A persistent pattern of surprises forces individuals to cast around for alternative ways of life (or theories) that can provide a more satisfying fit with the world as it is. (69)

Now it is nonsensical to speak of "evidence building up against" values, as opposed to evidence building up against the success of ways of life in satisfying the values allegedly impressed by the ways of life onto their participants as being desirable. In other words, there can be evidence from "surprises" against means, but not ends. So by appealing to the role of cognitive dissonance, the authors *cannot* explain changes in people's preferences; they can at best explain changes in people's strategies for achieving their preferences. As in their claim that history can play a role in Cultural Theory, it is only by conflating what Cultural Theory purports to explain (the formation of ends) with what it does not (the evaluation of means) that the authors create the illusion that it is compatible with change.

But even in accounting for changes in the means for satisfying preferences, Cultural Theory must isolate the suddenly rational individual from any interaction with others or with cultural traditions. For if it were admitted that historically contingent cultural institutions might provide information about means—e.g., that Cambridge might have inspired enthusiasm even for communist means of social organization—it would take little imagination to ask if cultural institutions could have inspired enthusiasm for communist *values* as well. Hence the naïve scientism of Cultural Theory's portrait of the *Zweckrationale* individual, who receives the stimulus to changing his or her mind not from autonomous or semi-autonomous cultural influences, but from *reality itself*; and who, in deciding upon his or her new means-preferences, draws solely on the unmediated observation of reality. This is the only way that change could be allowed to enter an exogenously deterministic model without letting in history along with it.

By carefully restricting the influences on an individual's preferences to either her given social structures (for her ends) or others' given social structures (for her means), Cultural Theory parallels the naturalistic tendencies of endogenous determinism by reducing society to the status of a physical object, like the rocks beneath our feet or the trees in our path, to which we passively conform. When our preferences do change, it is because we bump into something we did not expect to encounter, awakening us from our dogmatic slumber just long enough to allow us, with no help from others, to conduct experiments upon our environment until we find a more "fitting" way of life. In this picture of human life, only the instrumental rationality of preferences is ever called into question, and

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then only by an individual conceived of as an atomic fragment of a preference-determining whole, bereft of culturally mediated relationships to the ideas of other people—contemporaries or predecessors. The upshot is that Cultural Theory tells against the genealogy and criticism of preferences just as effectively as does its libertarian progenitor.

Only if culture is not a realm in which we merely collide with each other in our passive mode, or rearrange our relationships with each other in our active mode; only if it is where we *communicate* with each other—through symbols that take on a history of their own—all the time, is it possible that investigations of culture will expose to criticism the sources of not only the means, but the ends we find reasonable. By making culture a device by which self-contained, yet monocausally determined social monads signal one another in order, as economists put it, to *coordinate* their movements, Cultural Theory reproduces in a different form the deracinated and conservative picture found in economistic and libertarian theory. In both Cultural Theory and libertarian liberalism, human deliberation is concerned only with the forms by which people array themselves against each other, about which nothing more need be telegraphed than "this is what I prefer"; there is no place for the communication and criticism of values, i.e. of what one *should* prefer. Both in its passive, socially reductive mode and its active, atomistic rationalism, Cultural Theory fails to allow for the criticism of preferences, shielding them from genealogy by making them either means decided scientistically by atomized individuals or ends determined automatically by social context. In neither case do we get any closer to finding out their sources than in the libertarian liberal view, in which preferences are ends determined automatically by the inner self.

Max Weber saw modernity as the triumph of instrumental over substantive rationality, a triumph of technology over morality. In our terms, this is the triumph of a determinism of ends over a recognition that it is we, not our social contexts or our inaccessible selves, who decide what to value. The conditions which led to this triumph—and to modern culture—have yet to be fully investigated. But progress along these lines will be slow as long as the investigators are themselves caught up in the question of the distribution of authority, which is the very question that needs to be explained.

NOTES

1. E.g. Aaron Wildavsky, "Choosing Preferences by Constructing Institutions: A Cultural Theory of Preference Formation," *American Political Science Review* 81, no. 1 (March 1987): 3–21.

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2. Id., "Can Norms Rescue Self-Interest or Macro Be Joined to Micro?" CRITICAL REVIEW 5, no. 3 (Summer 1991): 301–24.
3. Cf. Ryszard Legutko, "Society as a Department Store," CRITICAL REVIEW 4, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 327–43.
4. The following analysis of multiculturalism merely obtains in principle because only on one level is multiculturalism negative-libertarian; at a deeper level it is positive-libertarian. For only in part is its purpose to give students from oppressed groups the sort of education they would "prefer" to receive; if this were their only purpose, then multiculturalists would join libertarians in trying to marketize education so that it responded to its "consumers'" desires. That they do not do so indicates that the deeper intent is to *shape* students' preferences so as to prevent them from oppressing each other in the future, by informing them about the horrors of oppression past and present. This is not to say, though, that even on this deeper level multiculturalists are not libertarians; after all, what constitutes oppression for them is precisely the violation of people's equal right to individual liberty.
5. That is, the preferences of those among the oppressed who recognize that the most important feature of their identity is whatever it is that has led to their oppression.
6. E.g. Aaron Wildavsky and Karl Dake, "Theories of Risk Perception: Who Fears What and Why?" *Daedalus* 119, no. 4 (Fall 1990): 41–60.
7. Julian L. Simon, *The Ultimate Resource* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).
8. Edward C. Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1958).
9. Richard Ellis and Aaron Wildavsky, "A Cultural Analysis of the Role of Abolitionists in the Coming of the Civil War," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, no. 1 (January 1990): 89–116.
10. Some passages of *Cultural Theory* suggest equivocation about the direction of the causal arrow. The authors write that "causal priority, in our conception of ways of life, is given neither to cultural bias nor to social relations. . . . As in the case of the chicken and the egg, it is sufficient to show that cultural biases and social relations are responsible for one another, without confronting the issue of which came first" (1). They add that "institutions generate distinctive sets of preferences, and adherence to certain values legitimizes corresponding institutional arrangements. Asking which comes first or which should be given causal priority is a nonstarter" (21). But as the many passages quoted in the text show, the authors fail to take these disclaimers seriously, typically suggesting that they do accord initial causal priority to society over culture—as confirmed by these remarks: "the problem we have set for ourselves is not one of origins—when and how did ways of life emerge? It is instead a problem of persistence—*how, having come into being, does a way of life sustain itself* (and change)?" (1, emph.

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added). To say that "*social relations generate preferences and perceptions* that in turn sustain those relationships" (2, emph. added) is not the same as saying that the issue of origins is a non-starter.

In any event, the real problem is not the direction(s) of the causal arrow. The problem is the absence of a middle term, intersubjective culture, which introduces historical contingency into what people find reasonable. The authors' explicit inclination against a vulgar reduction of culture to society is ill served by a schema in which only those two terms exist: in the absence of a middle term, a critic might inquire which of the social types it is that makes Cultural Theory itself seem reasonable to its originators, or whether Cultural Theory is not itself a manifestation of one or another of the cultural biases. This would cause the same problems for Cultural Theory that plague those versions of Marxism that leave no room for Marxists whose beliefs derive not from class position but from education. I argue below that in order to extricate themselves from an equally rigid social determinism, the authors end up embracing an implausibly atomistic rationalism.

11. See e.g. references in nn1, 6 above.
12. Aaron Wildavsky, "The Media's 'American Egalitarians,'" *The Public Interest* no. 88 (Summer 1987): 94–104.
13. For a masterful survey of both the ideological and social factors that may have been involved in the rise of egalitarian individualism, see J.G. Merquior, "For the Sake of the Whole," CRITICAL REVIEW 4, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 301–25.
14. Wildavsky, "Can Norms Rescue Self-Interest?"
15. *Ibid.*, 307.
16. David Laitin, "Political Culture and Political Preferences," *American Political Science Review* 81, no. 1 (March 1987): 589–93, at 590.
17. In fact, Kim Philby did study economics at Cambridge, but apparently only *after* being inspired by the left-wing idealism of Maurice Dobb, which played to Philby's already well-established sympathies. See Phillip Knightley, *The Master Spy: The Story of Kim Philby* (New York: Vintage, 1988), ch. 1, esp. 30–31 on Dobb and 33 on Philby's prior conviction "that the rich had had it too damned good for damned long and that the poor had had it too damned bad and that it was time that it was changed."

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J.G. Merquior

DEATH TO *HOMO ECONOMICUS?*

[Various contemporary currents of sociological, economic and historical thought threaten to kill the notion of economic man. But these tendencies not only rest on dubious evidence and arguments; they preclude any non-ideological understanding of the progress of modernity; they stand in the way of a relegitimation of the negative-libertarian aspect of modern liberalism; and they lay the groundwork for a wildly unrealistic form of social science. For these reasons, Homo economicus *deserves resuscitation as both a reflection of human choice-making and as an invaluable ideal type.*

– Ed.]

"Who killed Herbert Spencer?" Some forty years ago, Talcott Parsons opened his inquiry into the theoretical foundations of sociology, *The Structure of Social Action,* with this striking question. Today, one might well ask: who wants to kill *Homo economicus*? For there is no doubt that this brave man, as conceptual and even mythical as he is, is in danger of dying. Several streams of thought, among the most prestigious of recent years, prove to be wholly resolved to dispose of him for good. The image of the

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J.G. Merquior, the author of, among many other works, *The Veil and the Mask: Essays on Culture and Ideology* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979) and *Rousseau and Weber: Two Studies in the Theory of Legitimacy* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), was a contributing editor of CRITICAL REVIEW at the time of his death. Obituaries appear elsewhere in this issue.

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calculating individual enamored of instrumental rationality—of Weber's *Zweckrationalität*—seems to thinkers in these traditions both a moral mutilation and an analytical abnormality. For this reason, they do not hide their intention to work toward his practical and intellectual elimination.

What are these theoretical traditions? I believe I can discern at least seven, stemming from five disciplines in the social sciences and humanities:

1) so-called post-industrial sociology;[1]

2) the anti-utilitarian ethics of modern social contract theorists, with John Rawls as leader;[2]

3) the democratic theory of C. B. Macpherson;[3]

4) the social criticism offered by a certain historical philosophy of culture, illustrated in particular by the work of Jürgen Habermas;[4]

5) Cambridge-style *political economics* (let us emphasize the terminology), whose principal source remains the work of the neo-Ricardian, Piero Sraffa;[5]

6) economic anthropology, reinforced by the hyper-institutionalist orientation of the disciples of Karl Polanyi (many of them quasi-Marxists);[6]

7) finally, the comparative cultural anthropology of Louis Dumont.[7]

The prestige which surrounds the names of Bell, Rawls, Macpherson and Habermas, the posthumous or belated rise to fame of figures such as Polanyi and Sraffa the eminence of Louis Dumont in European sociological theory since Lévi-Strauss—all demonstrate that the stakes are considerable. It is not impossible that hatred of *Homo economicus* serves as the real common denominator for all these perspectives which are, in all other respects, so diverse. Whatever the case, I do not believe it an exaggeration to consider them as so many potential assassins of the notion of *Homo economicus*. Their complicity may be involuntary, but the crime is certainly premeditated. Yet let us not be hasty: before accusing the economic man's detractors we must absolve their victim and understand his true nature. For it happens that his relentless denouncers are gravely mistaken about him.

Homo economicus: *Caricature and Reality*

Let us, therefore, examine him without bias. There is, to be sure, a sort of intuitive sense about the notion of *Homo economicus* which immediately sends us back to two intellectual traditions: classical economics and utilitarianism. First and foremost, economic man is Adam Smith's hero and the subject of Bentham's hedonic calculus—in short, a figure legitimated two centuries ago by *The Wealth of Nations* and *A Fragment on Government*, both dating from 1776.[8] Of course, he followed the aristocratic ideal of honor,

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Renaissance-style *virtu*, the Puritanical *Homo religiosus*, and finally the dissolute hedonist repressed in baroque culture, then liberated in the rococo period (the "man of pleasure" is not necessarily a utilitarian, since Bentham readily admitted that the pleasure principle can take forms other than hedonism). Toward the end of the Enlightenment, the moral paradigm of *Homo economicus* encountered three rivals: the fanatically civic citizen, in the manner of Saint-Just; the virtuous man who followed Kant's Categorical Imperative; and Schiller's beautiful soul formed by the "self-culture"—the *Bildung*—of German Classicism.

The ideological impact of this threefold rivalry in the post-Revolutionary bourgeois conscience explains, in large part, the decline of economic man since the nineteenth century. The revolutionary, the ethicist and the aesthete (in the Kierkegaardian sense of the latter words) together doomed any utilitarian calculus to tremendous contempt. Jacobin paranoia, moral subjectivism (an offshoot of Lutheran *sola fides subjectiva*), and "humanist" and bohemian narcissism collectively blamed the "sordid" narrowness of the moral schema of the bourgeois economists and their "colleagues," the utilitarian philosophers. This accusation was to overshadow an entire literature, until Belle Epoque Nietzscheans such as Spengler would rant and rave against the baseness of "Anglo-materialism." In addition, hostility to the individual as a sensual being was strong enough to force some of his defenders and justifiers to *sublimate* considerably their conception of "hedonic" desire: to wit Hegel, who legitimated civil bourgeois society, but used the state, guardian of Reason throughout history, to deprive it of its ascendancy; or John Stuart Mill, for whom utilitarian happiness became derivative and sublimated rather than directly sought after.

One could object that none, or very little, of this concerns the social sciences, and yet it is precisely these sciences which we suspect of plotting the demise of economic man: for anti-utilitarianism has not failed to make its mark even in this domain. Let us take, for example, the founders of sociological thought. Among them is one of the most eminent critics of utilitarianism and utilitarian individualism, Emile Durkheim. It is not by chance that in Parsons's "police enquiry," Durkheim figures—in contrast to Marshall and much more than Pareto and even Weber—as the chief suspect in the "murder" of Spencer (inasmuch as Spencer represented for Parsons a model of the theoretical interweaving of individualism and utilitarianism—a conclusion one could question). Up to this point, nevertheless, the ideological substratum of the social sciences as a whole had not shown any pronounced or widespread repugnance for *Homo economicus*. Durkheimian anti-utilitarianism was certainly not the most influential element in his seminal sociological research. This phenomenon is recent, and

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is significant in that it threatens to invade what seemed to be economic man's most secure bastion, economic theory itself.

The curious component of the matter is that, in all the virtuous anti-utilitarian uproar, past and present, "economic man" remains misunderstood. What is held against him if not his being a slave to the crudest pleasures, a heartless and tasteless philistine, a Father Grandet, or a Josiah Bounderby? Yet the truth is that our *Homo economicus* is not at all this vile materialist, this ignoble maniac, this fanatic of sordid passions. As David Seckler has recently pointed out, the true image of man which is presupposed by economic analysis and similar approaches, is first and foremost that of a *selector*: "Contrary to popular supposition, economics has never regarded anyone as a single objective maximizer as in the *stereotype* of *Homo economicus*. If such an obsessive person ever were to exist, the one thing he would not be is an economic man since he would have no problem of choice."[9]

In a word: *Homo economicus* evaluates; he always weighs things. He contemplates the most diverse goals, goals which must often be numerous and which he must perceive as distinct notions. Nothing prevents the objects of his desire from being among the most human, the most "noble" that we have—a tender or sublime love, a heroic ideal, an unselfish devotion, etc. For economic man, as a good Benthamite, does not know any a priori axiological hierarchies: he can perform his calculus on any sort of values. If he is not by definition a hero or saint, it is only by definition that he is not: nothing prevents him from becoming one without for all that denying his nature. The only condition on his choice is that he must *choose* in full consciousness of the ends/means relationship as well as the losses or gains from the perspective of *other* values. What defines the behavior of economic man is not, then, the quality of his goals, but rather the lucidity of his actions. That this could have been doubted for so long is due to the fact that the bourgeoisophobe (Flaubert's word) anger of a whole current of thought and sensibility was allowed to diminish the truth of the canonical utiliarian texts—precisely those which are recognized as Bibles of "economic ideology."

That summarizes the moral psychology of economic man. However, *Homo economicus* serves not only as a reflection of man but also as an ideal type. He already functioned in this way for Smith and he would continue as a principal model of explication for sociology. I am thinking here of the tradition of historical sociology's founding fathers and in particular of the (in my opinion) illuminating manner in which Raymond Boudon has drawn from this hypothetical concept a small number of analytical paradigms of social action.[10]

Let us quickly recall three of these paradigms. First scenario: the capital-

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ists of the third book of *Capital*. They are searching for profit through competition, they recognize that productivity increases profit, they therefore invest in more and more efficient machinery; doing this, they increase the share of fixed capital, but not the share of variable capital or surplus value. Consequence: a downswing in the profit rate, jeopardizing the very survival of the system. Second scenario: the French aristocrats contrasted with their English counterparts in *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*. Whereas in France the venality of office attracts the nobility and upper bourgeoisie, in England, where they are not subjected to such seductions, these classes invest more willingly in the capitalization of agriculture; one case results in the hardening of privileges, thus the Revolution, the other in the triumph of capitalism and the emergence of a merchant aristocracy. Third scenario: the Puritans of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Socialized in Calvinist soteriology, the Puritans organized their lives in an ascetic, practical and methodical manner—attributes remarkably favorable both to saving and to the rationalization of economic activity.

These three famous scenarios have in common that they all describe unintentional consequences as instigated by the most rational of actions. Marx's capitalists obviously did not fancy the downfall of capitalism by the lowering of the profit rate any more than Tocqueville's *noblesse de robe* wanted the Revolution, or Weber's Puritans the establishment of capitalism. They differ from each other in their acknowledgement or denial of elements *exterior* to the rational action initiated by the actors; those who do concede the existence of these external factors grant them varying degrees of significance. While these factors play no important role in the case of the Marxian capitalists, they do affect the situation of Tocqueville's aristocrats and Weber's Puritans; but whereas for the former the "given" factor is, as it were, directly before the actors (it is the existence of the venal offices of which they take account in their decisions), the given in the situation of the Puritans is evident only *through* their actions: it merges with their type of socialization, thus with a factor which precedes choice.

This problem remains fascinating for those who want to grasp its "social logic" (Boudon) without recourse to some speculative *coup d'état* and without believing in mysterious forces, sacred or secular. However, *what is important for us to emphasize is the ubiquity of* Homo economicus *as a tacit model of analysis in all of these paradigms of sociological explication.* In effect, these three cases confront us with actors (ideal types) devoted to choice. It matters little if, from this point of view, only the Marxian capitalist seems to us a close relative of the Benthamite utilitarian. Like him, Tocqueville's aristocrat and Weber's Puritan have made choices; and, once having chosen their values, all three have acted by adapting their behavior based upon rational consideration of ends and means. It is in this not insignificant

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sense that *Homo economicus* serves as a sort of archparadigm of analysis in the social sciences.

Seven Economicides

Let us now leave aside the distortion of *Homo economicus* and turn to the arguments of his mortal enemies—the "economicides." It is evident that the task at hand is not to formulate a comprehensive judgment, let alone a full analysis of these seven streams of thought. Such a judgment would be, in the space of this article and within the limits of the author's competence, as presumptuous as inefficacious. Moreover, I do not question the sometimes important theoretical interest (at least on the heuristic level) of the positions mentioned here. Quite simply, we must focus our (necessarily succinct) criticism on an ideological aspect of their arguments: their conscious rejection of the image of economic man.

First, post-industrial prophecy. The general idea is fairly well-known. It predicts the emergence of a "service-oriented society" (already extensive in America and well underway in the rest of the industrialized world) marked by an increasingly non-materialistic mode of consumption, by the triumph of "quality of life," and by the reign of knowledge; in such a society, technological expertise will tend to replace unskilled labor, and education will prevail over propriety as a source of power.

The gospel of post-industrialist sociology remains the brilliant work of Daniel Bell, whose influence in this domain surpasses by far that of Alain Touraine. We may, however, compare the theses of Bell with those of authors such as E.F. Schumacher (*Small is Beautiful*), the Galbraith of *Economics and the Public Purpose*, Ralf Dahrendorf (*The New Liberty*), and even the late lamented Fred Hirsch (*The Social Limits to Growth*). All of these works, published during the 1970s, concern what Jonathan Gershuny felicitously calls "the improvement ideology": the refutation of Western man's productivist, privatist and consumption ethos—justified in terms of the highest and most public values of the social man.[11]

Bell is convinced that in the service-oriented economy of post-industrialism, the reified and reifying economic mode is in the process of giving way to a new mentality: a distinctly anti-capitalistic, sociologically oriented "ethic of community." According to him, one must "separate political liberalism from bourgeois society." He declares bourgeois society distinctly outmoded in a tone that sometimes recalls the catastrophism of Robert Heilbroner's theory of the collapse of "business civilization."[12] Nevertheless, Bell is hardly pessimistic: although he foresees the prospective end of capitalism without remorse, he greets wholeheartedly the coming of a service society. Services, he writes, are "games between people,"

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and not, as in industrial society's reified consumption, relationships of men to things.

Schumacher, who did not hesitate to subscribe to the oracles of the Club of Rome, ardently proposed a Lilliputian utopia based on a "Buddhist" economics; he was highly nostalgic for the artisan class and a fierce enemy of the society of consumption. Galbraith and Hirsch show much more reserve concerning Utopianism, but they side with the improvement ideologists in insisting on the need for a "public design" and they scoff at the irrationalism and gross inefficiency inherent in unlimited private consumption. In much the same vein, Dahrendorf sets "improvement" against growth; the originality of his contribution is lodged in his denunciation of the cupidity of the "industrial classes"—corporate owners and salaried classes who, in their greed for profits and higher salaries, remain the prey of the "growth mentality."[13]

The trouble is, the empirical basis of post-industrial prophecy proves not to be very solid. We shall skip over the misconceptions about social structure that are involved: the tendency to overestimate occupation to the detriment of class position, or even the equivocation about occupational changes themselves—the transfer of women from domesticity to non-domestic services, for example. Such changes are too often included in the so-called general shift towards employment in the service industries. Let us also skip the socioeconomic blunders in the scenario depicted by the post-industrial prophets. These prophets often forget to indicate that many jobs in the tertiary sector (in Great Britain, for example, more than half) do not in fact fall under the rubric of service-procuring activity in the sense of "games between people," but rather under the rubric of activity narrowly linked to the production of material goods (marketing, banking, insurance). In short, there is service and then there is service.

Gershuny presents a much more interesting criticism: he notes that the post-industrial thesis of the emergence of a service economy *simply confuses the dynamic of employment with the dynamic of consumption.*[14] In sum: from the fact that the Western salaried class is concentrated more and more in the tertiary sector, post-industrial sociology deduces that services are in the process of replacing material goods in of consumption. The statistics, however, blatantly contradict this position. Much to the contrary, instead of multiplying their purchase of services, Western households are buying more durable goods which permit the buyers to produce services *by and for themselves*. The most clear-cut tendency is toward the general replacement of laundry service with the washing machine or the replacement of language courses with the linguaphone.

One cannot easily characterize the inhabitants of a *self*-service society as non-individualistic and anti-utilitarian. It is more probable that the resi-

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dents of the rich suburbs will be less given to communitarian nostalgia, to *Gemeinschaftlust*, than are the post-industrialist sociologist-prophets. (In fact, owing to their anti-economic mindset, the latter seem more like pre-industrial sympathizers than genuine post-industrialist.) It is theoretically possible that the increasingly affluent and educated suburbs will assume a more active political role, and often reverse the conservative positions of the silent majority[15]—soon to be minority. But in itself this tendency, insofar as it exists, is perfectly compatible with individualist and utilitarian libertarianism; in any case, it contains no element, a priori, of a new "ethic of community."

We have deliberately focused on post-industrial sociology because it was up to it to give us a reasonable prediction of the end of the economico-utilitarian mentality. It has, however, done nothing of the sort. Instead, as we have seen, empirical research has come *to the rescue* of *Homo economicus* on the practical and moral levels. The net result of post-industrial reverie and its fellow travelers in "improvement ideology" —the pretended primacy of this new, sociologically oriented mentality—is a purely theoretical view.

Post-industrial futurology does not, however, lack objective allies. Two normative theories in particular concur with it: Rawlsian ethics and Macpherson's conceptualization of democracy. Both theories profess to be individualistic (their authors being seasoned liberals); neither hides its hostility to the specter of utilitarianism.

John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1972)—the most significant contemporary work in Anglo-Saxon moral philosophy—aspires technically to be a renewal of "contractarianism," that is of the social contract theory so cherished in Locke's and Rousseau's political philosophy. The novelty in Rawls rests in his describing the people who uphold the social contract as if they found themselves in an "original position" characterized, in matters of each individual's preferences and particular interests, by a "veil of ignorance."

If, Rawls writes, in such a position people are rational and do not think only of their own interests, they will be quickly led to adopt two principles of justice, or rather of justice-cum-equality (justice as fairness): first, each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others; second, every inequality must benefit the least advantaged members of society. According to Rawls, the individuals behind the "veil of ignorance," being only very moderately altruistic, would prefer these principles on the basis of a "maximin" criterion: uncertain about the consequences of their choices, they would always want to maximize their potential gains while minimizing their potential disadvantages by assuring themselves that each inequality benefit

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the least well-off of the members of the social pact. "Maximin" is, in sum, a prudential measure.

Rawls regards his conception of an imaginary original blindness as a "procedural interpretation" of Kant's Categorical Imperative.[16] For him, the veil of ignorance enables the retrieval of our noumenal selves by permitting the expression of their true nature as rational and equal members of a morally intelligible world. The second part of his treatise, devoted to institutions, makes it evident that Rawls seeks to establish a liberal order where what is generally understood as economic liberalism shifts to the background while more egalitarian connotations occupy the forefront.

Yet, for egalitarians in the anarcho-cooperativist tradition (dating back to Godwin, Proudhon, Kropotkin and William Morris; and still represented in the Anglo-Saxon world by, if you will, the succession from Tawney to R.M. Titmuss, its last prophet at the London School of Economics), Rawlsian equity does not suffice. One of them, Brian Barry, has submitted Rawls's sizeable treatise to a detailed critique which does not hesitate to make the allegation of a "superficial egalitarianism" which falls short of the principles of true distributive justice.[17] Other "progressive" liberals, such as Macpherson, emphasizing the near-sightedness of Rawls concerning class status, have accused his contractualist conception of being pledged to an image of man conforming too much to the perspective of the consumer: from this point of view, Rawlsian justice would be a mere idealization of American liberal capitalism.[18] On the other hand, Ronald Dworkin, the "liberals'" little darling in matters of legal philosophy, maintains that the original position theory must be taken as the ethico-political foundation of a defense and illustration of the right to equal consideration (equal respect and concern).[19]

We will not attempt to assess these issues here. It suffices to indicate that they all accept a central point in Rawls's theory: *his disputation of utilitarianism*. Indeed, Rawls clearly distinguishes his idea of justice, which is *deontological*, from utilitarian morality, which is *teleological*. The former upholds duty, the latter goals identified by individual desires. The essential difference centers on the priority of goods over the good [*du bien ou di bon*], of the advantageous over the fitting, in the conception of justice. Rawls does not hide the fact that his rule of fairness "imposes some restrictions" on the conception of personal benefit; at the same time, he criticizes the utilitarian custom of reasoning as if justice were only a projection of the principle of individual choice onto society.

Utilitarianism, as we have seen, was and remains in all respects a justification of liberty as freedom of choice. This is why it retains from classical ethics a *cognitive* theory of values while giving them a *naturalist*, i.e. non-

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transcendental, interpretation. On the other hand, the moral tradition in which Rawls claims to be rooted, i.e. the tradition of the Categorical Imperative, *removes* the cognitive foundation of values and morality whereas, in its anti-naturalist tendencies, it aims to restore a moral hierarchy—the supremacy of reason over the passions—which was contested by the liberal impetus of classical utilitarianism. In my opinion, it is precisely the insensitivity of Rawls's vaguely egalitarian liberalism to the empirical and historical dimensions of this moral problem which makes it a doctrinal masterpiece of contemporary anti-utilitarianism.[20]

In the past, anti-utilitarian sentiment was the distinguishing mark of that conservatism which was both moral and politico-social. Could it be that this conservatism has become the prerogative of a politico-social "progressivism"—the progressivism of the socialistically oriented "liberals"—confirming a general suspicion about the limitless variety of appetites and passions of man? In any case, those who hasten to declare *A Theory of Justice* the pinnacle of contemporary ethical thought could at least take the trouble to ponder a few remarkable revivals of utilitarian naturalism, such as Anthony Quinton's *The Nature of Things*—published only a year after Rawls's book.

Moreover, the sociologist has a right to call into question the level of applicability of Rawlsian ethics to industrial societies. Rawls, of course, does not present his practical and institutional maximin "deductions" as a legitimation of contemporary society per se. Yet neither does he offer them as prerequisites for the radical reconstruction of advanced capitalist society; the precedence he gives liberty (his first rule of justice) over equality (his second rule) has been generally interpreted as an acceptance of the liberal model. In this light, the goal of his theory seems to be to outline a "generative grammar" of the legitimacy of liberal institutions, a sort of conceptual yardstick against which to measure their justice. It is at precisely this point—as Boudon has shown[21]—that the project threatens to capsize. In effect, Rawls hardly takes into account society's degree of complexity, which often consists in the involuntary, "perverse effects" of collective behavior which, from another angle, it would be distinctly illiberal to suppress. The individual's liberty to choose his level of instruction (for example) ranks among the principal causes of the persistence of inequalities. In short, Rawlsian moral doctrine is, sociologically speaking, too naïve. It may be excessive to consider it a simple idealization of the capitalist welfare state, but there is no doubt that it fails as a verifying instrument for legitimacy in a society lacking central regulation of an authoritarian type.

It is not surprising that Bell should embrace Rawlsian "maximin" ethics, a set of ideas which, from his perspective, is flawed only in its postulation

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of a stationary state of the economy.[22] Evidently, the new communitarian ethic sought after by post-industrial sociology is compatible with Rawlsian anti-utilitarianism. The same can be said of another normative theory, that of Macpherson on democracy.

In his recent book, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*, which represents in several respects the crowning synthesis of his political thought, the celebrated Canadian theorist examines four conceptions of democracy. A direct descendent of classical Benthamite utilitarianism, the first conception turns upon the notion of man defined as a competitive creature wanting to maximize his potentially infinite desires. By contrast, in the second conception of democracy, illustrated by John Stuart Mill, man aspires above all to expand his faculties; he is no longer a possessive and predatory consumer (possessive individualism being Macpherson's *bête noire*); he becomes a being in quest of self-perfection. However, this political model remains insufficiently egalitarian; we are still very close to the "market mentality." The pluralism of Dahl and company constitutes the third conception. Here democracy is a competition between elites, mass participation discouraged, and the moral inspiration of classical democracy abandoned. For participation, not in the particular forms of political liberalism which we enjoy in industrialized democracies but within the same general framework, defines the fourth model, the one upheld by Macpherson himself.

Contrary to Macpherson's early views, which tended to reduce democracy to its social dimension, putting the emphasis on mass participation certainly has some merit. In effect, under the pretext of fidelity to the classical authors, notably Aristotle, he had emphasized that democracy originally meant "government *by* or *in the interest* of the formerly oppressed class."[23] Jack Lively has pointed out the ambiguity of this "or": for Aristotle, democracy is above all else a *political* matter. Democracy meant government by the majority, and consequently—the majority being poor—by the poor. The essential aspect was the political, not the social; the fundamental equality was political equality, to the exclusion of all others.[24] This is not to say that other dimensions of inequality do not sometimes heavily influence political equality, but clearly we are precluded from speaking of democracy—as the early Macpherson did—when political equality does not play an important role (for example, in the self-proclaimed "people's democracies").

However, Macphersonian democracy, participatory or not, continues to be fiercely anti-utilitarian. He fervently laments the desire to consume, the fact that the bourgeois masses prefer "affluence to community." On that count, we must note, the criticism levelled at Rawls by Macpherson seems rather like a domestic quarrel. At the heart of the matter what one finds is

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an obvious distortion of utilitarianism, thoroughly denounced by Kenneth Minogue.[25] In effect, the thesis that there is no limit to individual desires (the theme of Hobbes and Bentham) proves to be less a description of social decay than a *constitutive* proposal aimed at diverting the political order from too artificially regulating human affairs. In reality, it is evident that men are not so voracious. But, whereas Macpherson's gloomy interpretation of consumerism may be only hyperbole, its political implications may prove—despite their apology for participatory civics—deliberately restrictive. Any authoritarian cut in consumption, explicitly restrictive or more subtly "educational," contributes to the demise of liberty. Any such measure would beg the age-old question: who will educate the educators? Since choices would already have been made—choices preconditioning our own—to what extent are we free to choose? Here again, the attacks against utilitarianism harbor danger for liberty.

Post-industrial sociology claims to derive the end of economics from the demise of industrialist social structure. For the sociologist, the importance of Habermas's Frankfurt school-derived critical theory consists primarily in its claim to locate this demise *much earlier* in social evolution. Whereas Bell's millennium represents the future of tertiary activity, Habermas rejects all temporal realizations of his communicative utopia and prefers to locate the demise of the primacy of the economic *in the recent past*, i.e. from the advent of *Spätkapitalismus* at the turn of the last century. It was, in effect, during this period that the state got mixed up in the economy and that science became a productive force.[26] From that point on, Habermas believes, industrial development itself has sounded the death knell for criticism of political economics. Under the new "political instrumentalities" (Claus Offe), the emancipatory role of theory shifts toward the domain of cultural analysis. For it is "culture," the reservoir of mediations necessary for the legitimation of the bourgeois order, which today harbors the potential for a break with the activities and benefits of the alienating machinery of capitalism.[27]

In light of the celebrity acquired by Habermas in Europe and the Americas, the extreme brevity of this commentary is perhaps excusable. We must, however, explicitly underscore Habermas's *lack of emphasis* on *instrumental action*—the action which rendered *Homo economicus* both a moral and an epistemological paradigm. The work/interaction dichotomy—narrowly linked in theory to the opposition between *techne* and *praxis*, or between instrumental rule and axiological norm—assumes prominence in Habermasian criticism in two fundamental aspects: the logic of the social sciences[28] on the one hand, social theory on the other. The thinker who concerns himself with "the repression of ethics per se as an existential category"[29] must ultimately dissociate domination from class structure and

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identify it with a very vague cultural setting. Having become a matter of communication and of language, domination is overcome by a utopia, the grammar of a pragmatics of dialogue. A weak metaphor—sociality as conversation— hardly adds credibility to an unconvincing re-evocation of timeworn German "pedagogical" idealism. It is only through such measures, however, that Habermas endeavors to evade the *Kulturpessimismus* of his precursors, the disenchanted Marxists named Horkheimer and Adorno.

But who cannot discern that the victim of this radical culturalism is *infrastructure* as much as instrumental rationality? In proposing to replace the pair forces/relationships of production with the antithesis work/interaction as the engine of history, Habermas regrettably moves away from the use of what Raymond Aron calls "the theme of infrastructure" in sociological analysis.[30] Obviously, this does not entail the vain dogmatism of determining "instances" in which Althusserian scholasticism has been the latest to get bogged down. We are simply alluding to the sense of constraint, determinism, which no explication (sociological or otherwise) can easily do without.[31] But while Habermas's passionately anti-economistic "cultural" criticism weakens their relationship, may we not legitimately suspect that *Homo economicus* and the theme of infrastructure are, to a certain extent, connected? In any case, this is what Boudon's sociological paradigms have led us to believe.

Lucio Colletti has strongly suggested that in order to redeem the scientific aim of Marxism, it is necessary to liberate historical materialism from the dialectic—a metaphysical demon if ever there was one.[32] Habermasian discourse, so proud of its idealist ancestors, the Fichtes and Hegels, undoubtedly pursues a course antithetical to the one Colletti—and anyone else with interests in a genuine social science—would have followed.

At the risk of irritating the reader, we will be even more brief on the subject of the two "economicides" that follow: the Cambridge economists and Polanyian anthropology. The position of the Cambridge economists, said to be from the new school (of thought), stems largely from conclusions they have borrowed from neo-Ricardian analysis, elaborated by Piero Sraffa in *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities*. Sraffa is as unknown as he is legendary; he succeeded in fascinating Keynes and Wittgenstein after having demonstrated a noble loyalty to the imprisoned Gramsci. The goal of his small book (less than 100 pages), conceived forty years before its publication, was to offer a solution to the problem raised by Ricardo: how to find a constant measure of value, i.e. a criterion to measure the costs of production which reflect only variations in the technique of production. Unlike Marx, Sraffa finds the profit rate and the relative price of merchandise by means of hypotheses completely unre-

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lated to trade regulated by the amount of work incorporated in the merchandise (surplus value). His solution consists in isolating a "standard composite commodity," the counterpart of the wheat in the model Ricardo offers in his essay *On Profit*, which meets the conditions mentioned above.

Although some regret its excessive *abstraction*, we will not be so rash as to criticize Sraffian reasoning.[33] What is important to us, on the other hand, is his principal conclusion: the national product, in physical terms and in terms of value, is in no way affected by the manner in which the net profit is divided between salaries and profits. This is the point so strikingly grasped by Joan Robinson, then by all the big names of the Cambridge school: the distribution of revenue is *economically undetermined*, it is determined only through class struggle. For economists such as Edward Nell or Domenico Mario Nuti, the neo-classicists have ignored the full semantic import of the expression "*political* economics." But since distribution is not a consequence of trade, *it is especially necessary to take the political into account*: "Orthodox economics tries to show that markets allocate scarce resources according to relative efficiency; political economics tries to show that markets distribute revenue according to relative power."[34] Ultimately, "Sraffa's *tabula rasa*" (Claudio Napoleoni) breaks with the subject/object relationship in economics; thanks to this relationship, the traditional problem of Marxian analysis—the question of the "transformation" of surplus value into profit—may be declared "a pseudo-problem";[35] as a result, the criticism of exploitation becomes directly political. With the left at Cambridge, economicidal thought achieves its greatest feat; it conquers the logic of economics in the heart of economic theory itself!

In Nell's view, neo-classical analysis is guilty of ignoring both technological interdependencies and institutional relations.[36] On the other hand, economic anthropology claims to be decidedly institutionalist. Its most brilliant contemporary representatives (C. Meillassoux, M. Godelier, M. Sahlins) refer to the pioneering work of Karl Polanyi (1886–1964). Polanyi was a *Gemeinschaft* socialist whose central theses in comparative economics are the equivalents of a sort of historico-anthropological development of the Aristotelian conception of economics. Like Aristotle, he believed in the existence of "natural" and "anti-natural" forms of economic activity, of trade in particular. In examining classical Athens in the collective work *Trade and Market in the Early Empires*, he revalorizes the distinction between *metadosis*, natural trade because it took place between producers, and *chrematistike*, or commerce considered as unnatural because it occurred between non-productive merchants.

This captures the essential character of Polanyism. Subordination of the economic to the social—the goal of Communism according to Marx—

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served for him as the general rule of history as a whole. The one important exception—the "market society" of Victorian economic liberalism—would have been, for him, only an aberration indirectly responsible for the political maladies of our time, starting with the fascists (the thesis of his most well-known book, *The Great Transformation*, 1944). Polanyi emphasized above all the context of *distribution* of wealth, thus clearly distancing himself from the central role attribued by Marxism to *Produktionsverhältnisse*.[37] It is all the more ironic therefore to see Polanyi's view now "assimilated" by Marxist anthropologists.

Polanyi's message is clear. The autonomy of economics was only a brief historical anomaly. Even more than Habermas, Polanyi strongly suggests that the political will reassert its primacy: he rejects any presumption of economic causality as a means of explaining history. The logic of economic rationality—the "natural" potential of human action which Baechler meticulously elucidated[38]—remains, for Polanyi, only a teratological phenomenon. In fact, however, the man who denounced "our outmoded merchant mentality"—even if his work in comparative economics remains heuristically stimulating—was himself too enamored of a strangely archaic econophobia, the ideological origins of which date to the literary nostalgia of Romantic anti-capitalism. Given the situation, how could one, from the same perspective, objectively analyze contemporary society?

The institutionalism of the Polanyians is not the definitive anti-economist radicalization; another comparative approach, Louis Dumont's cultural anthropology, surpasses it in this respect. This brand of cultural anthropology represents the pinnacle of economicidal thought in the human sciences of the last two decades.

Dumont explicitly incorporates Polanyi into his project. In *Homo aequalis*, he praises Polanyi's "forceful demonstration" of the exceptional character of the modern era, its foundation on autonomy—on the radical separation of the economic from its social fabric.[39] Dumont's avowed goal is to broaden this analysis by managing to depict "economic ideology." At first, he distinguishes two social conceptions of wealth. In traditional societies, land and money, immovable and movable property, remain dissociated; property rights are interwoven into the social organization; the relationships between men prevail over the relationships between men and things. In modern society, in contrast, wealth becomes a unified category of which the model is primarily monetary, and the relationship between men and things moves to the forefront. Behind this contrast, Dumont discerns *the dichotomy of holism and individualism*. But he does not limit himself to that: he adds *a second antithesis, that between hierarchy and egalitarianism.*

Since he sees in the holism/hierarchy pair not only a logical relationship

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but also a predominant form of society, it follows that the most objective manner of elucidating the secret of our society, the modern West, consists in stepping beyond our sociocentrism by considering individualist and egalitarian society from the perspective of hierarchical society. Dumont, an accredited Indianist and the celebrated author of *Homo hierarchicus* (1967), an important study of the caste system, is obviously well qualified to guide us through this decentering enterprise. Weber wondered why capitalism did not emerge from non-Western civilizations. He saw the latter, then, as somehow *lacking*. In this respect Dumont is the anti-Weber: for him, the West is the exception; the "rest" of the world the rule.

We might also note the admirable art with which Dumont combines the contribution of Polanyi with the great diachronic systems of Victorian protosociology—his commentary on the shift from status to contract in Maine or from community to society in Tönnies, for example, and especially his persuasive attempt to raise the anthropological concept of "culture" to the level of Durkheimian collective representations. For what he calls ideology is precisely that: culture as collective representation. In a certain sense, Dumont endeavors to think through Tocqueville's problem—the problem of the dynamics of equality in modern society—with Durkheim's help. Assuredly, the author of *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* does not appear in *Homo aequalis*; his shadow was, however, more than present in *Homo hierarchicus*.[40]

I would venture to say that, to a large extent, Dumont's work implements a subtle unilateralization of Tocqueville's thought, especially when one considers the latter as a whole, i.e. without emphasizing *The Old Regime* at the expense of *Democracy in America*. For Dumont takes Tocqueville's critical reservations about egalitarianism to the point of suggesting some historical pathology: in his eyes egalitarian individualism is ultimately an ideology gone off the track, forgetful that it emerged from the holism inherent to both the "normal" state of society and to the perspicacity of sociology.

More specifically, if modern society remains the prey of totalitarianism, it is only because totalitarianism provides a blunt [*brutale*] response to an illness of civilization. It is nothing more than a contradictory attempt to re-subordinate the individual to the social whole, even though the society in which totalitarianism flourishes is the very one which obligates man to pose as an individual. Totalitarianism is the interior breakdown of individualist society—the breakdown announced by modern political theory each time it mandates, *on individualist premises*, the submission of the individual to the state (from Hobbes to Hegel). Even if the totalitarian phenomenon lays bare the *cryptoholism* of individualist modernity (its secret nostalgia for the whole, indeed for hierarchy), it does not, in so doing, erase the obses-

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sive fear of individualism, the genuine "implicit constraint" of our ideology. In brief, Dumont is not Macpherson.

This phenomenology of totalitarianism perfectly illustrates a genre of political analysis esteemed by Dumont as markedly superior to the ordinary practice of "political science." Obsessed by power-strength, political science neglects the essential: authority, i.e. power as a *value* or ideology.[41] As a result, it falls short of the holist approach. Similarly, Marxism, the most influential of the numerous theories based upon a critique of social power, suffers from a sort of "jet lag" compared to an authentic sociology. According to Dumont, Marx remains an individualist through and through, a *sociological economist rather than an authentic sociologist of the economy.*[42] For him, Marxism decidedly sides with egalitarian and individualist "economic ideology."

Dumont acknowledges that in shifting from *Homo hierarchicus* to *Homo aequalis*, he passes from sociological research to the history of values.[43] As it stands, however, his study centers on a "disembodied" ideology, to borrow Ernest Gellner's phrase.[44] Hence the ahistorical character of his categories—that of Western individualism, for starters. One can, of course, historically trace European individualism a long way back; but this is on the condition of *localizing* it through an exhaustive historiographical quest—precisely what Alan Macfarlane has recently offered us in an interesting criticism of Marx and Weber.[45] On the other hand, to hold, as does Dumont,[46] that individualism has been the constant ideology of the West at least since St. Thomas Aquinas with at most some thematic or quantitative variations (religious individualism, first "otherwordly" then more "this-worldly"; next, political individualism; finally, individualism in economic ideology) does not allow for very convincing sociological explanations.

Naturally, there is no harm in devoting oneself to the examination of values and ideology. If, however, this examination intends to serve as the foundation for a critique of modern society, as is clearly the case here, we have the right to demand that it broaden its sociological objectives. In Dumont's neo-Durkheimism, the morphological *relata* of collective representations are generally lacking. The foundations of society and the concrete implanting of values in collective life are conspicuous by their absence. The results of this attempt to illuminate, which calls itself "sociological," do not go beyond—and the author has the honesty to admit it—the history of ideas.

In these conditions, enthusiasm for the demise of Western sociocentrism sometimes takes on the color of anti-individualist *bias*: but then, Louis Dumont is free to choose to practice it, we are free to reject it. For those who refuse to embark on the anti-liberal boat, what is most worthy of

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remembering is the identification—which Dumont himself emphasized in making the connection between "economic ideology" and utilitarian ethics[47]—of individualism with *Homo economicus*. As for the rest, once again we must not fear to demand from anti-economic thought that which it owes us: it has the burden of theoretical, reasoned and convincing proof, of demonstrating the validity of its allergy. Otherwise, to each his own.

The Ideological Repercussions of Economicide

We can see the objective logic of the multiple attacks against *Homo economicus* (objective because it does not stem from the intentions, as such, of these seven "schools of thought," but from the collective results of their efforts). We have first of all an encomium of "the sociologically oriented world," envisaging a society where there will be little place for the economic motivation of behavior and, consequently, for the analysis of it in terms of instrumental rationality. Second, this desire to banish the economic mentality receives the reinforcement of two normative theories, one ethical (the anti-utilitarian neo-contractualism of Rawls), the other political (the anti-economic individualism of Macpherson). Then, social criticism, from the viewpoint of a philosophical history of "culture," finds itself without economic anchorage: Habermas's task. For post-industrial sociologists, techno-economic development will itself result in the obsolescence of the economic ethos; similarly, according to Habermas, we must await the techno-economic transformations of *Spätkapitalismus* for the emergence of the objective conditions compatible with a "de-economization" of social criticism. The Cambridge school goes even further. Sraffa in hand, it proceeds to demonstrate the non-existence of objective links between the system of market production and the level of wages—a radical politicization, then, of the criticism of exploitation accomplished at the expense of a surgical removal of a central element in Marxian thought. Not surprising, Marxo-Polanyian anthropology would respond: have we not noticed that the "autonomous" economy (the market) is only one possible effect—a perverse one—of a supra-economic institutional logic? Finally, our seventh economicide, it too of anthropological origin, intensifies to an even higher degree this subsumption of the economic. It invites us, as does Dumont, to consider "economic ideology" only a collective representation, a sort of black sheep among holist conceptions, which all societies necessarily make of themselves.

The task of discerning the ideological consequences of economicide remains. I can distinguish three, each heavy with disastrous implications both for society and for the social sciences.

The first is a certain conception of history. One could summarize it as

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the negation of the idea of progress. Several economicides voluntarily consider themselves "progressive" in the vaguely political sense of the word; despite their claims, none of them accept the notion that there has been a macro-historical development in the positive sense. On this point, Polanyi, Bell and Habermas seem to me much closer to the univocal moral condemnations of capitalism by the early nineteenth-century conservatives or to utopian socialists than to Marx's "necessitarian" critique. This moralist element, open or disguised, appears to me even more evident in the work of Macpherson and Rawls. As for Dumont, on this point clearly he distances himself from the Durkheimian perspective. Certainly Durkheim became more and more anguished by the modernity-anomie equation; he never ceased, however, believing in the benefits of the continued advance of the division of labor. In sum, economicidal trends prolong structuralism's entropic vision, which is at the origin of a very questionable chronophobia. It would, we might add, be easy to sketch out a criticism of anti-economic ideology as pseudo-scientific rhetoric, suitable for our own epoch of ecological *Angst* and social passions spurred on by recession and rising inflation. The neo-communitarianism of post-industrial prophecy is exemplary in this respect, yet it is not difficult to detect throughout this work a "siege mentality," an anti-productivist *écolâtrie* flavored with markedly pre-industrial nostalgia. Whether expressly or not, anti-economic thought bars the way to what is quite obviously one of the major tasks of historical sociology today: the critical revival, *but without hostile bias*, of the concepts of progress and development.

Second ideological repercussion: the weakening of individualism. Of course, several of our economicides—Bell, Rawls, Macpherson, Habermas—would protest, with good reason, this accusation, because they all present themselves as defenders of individuality. I cite as proof the dignified polyphonic utopia of Habermas, a veritable panegyric to the emancipation of individual conscience. Besides, to accuse them of liberticide would purely and simply be a matter of bad faith: there is no reason to doubt their sincerity when they uphold political liberalism, the rights of man, and so forth. Broadly speaking, they would all tell us that the liberty of a "public space" goes beyond the sorry needs of production and consumption and is much more propitious to the development of true individuality.

Moreover, and more generally, how can one neglect the *polymorphous* character of Western individualism? Élie Halévy was absolutely right when, near the end of his study on "philosophical radicalism" (in sum, utilitarianism), he presented individualism as a sort of common denominator in Western ethics, shared by cultural formations as varied as Roman

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Law and Christian moral doctrine, as well as by thinkers as diverse as Kant and Bentham.

However, our criticism becomes slightly more subtle. Without calling into question the liberal professions of faith of our illustrious economicides, our criticism asks whether the rejection of utilitarianism does not ultimately endanger the legitimacy of individualist values. One too often forgets the *libertarian* roots of utilitarian moral doctrine. As Shirley Letwin has brilliantly pointed out,[48] English philosophy from Hume to Bentham engaged itself in a spectacular critical demolition of axiological hierarchies. This movement was essentially anti-Platonic: it aimed at liberating passion from the yoke of puritanical and repressive reasoning commonly justified on the pretext of truth and morality. This movement represented an authentic revolution in ethics; it aimed at overturning the old Classical and Christian notions of *Homo duplex*, the model of man divided, often torn by the antagonism between divine reason and animalistic passions. This anti-hierarchical, egalitarian image of human passions, upheld by the epicureanism of Montaigne, subsequently theorized in Humean skepticism, was passed on to Enlightenment hedonism, then to utilitarianism; the heart of the utilitarian message was, essentially, "the selection of values by experience."[49] In sum, utilitarianism = empiricism = emancipation of the "morality of morals."

As a result, the real problem of liberalism in ethics becomes the resurgence of Puritanism. In this respect, the merging of utilitarian liberalism with the Comtean cult of progress, and mostly of intellectual progress, which was accomplished in the work of John Stuart Mill, has not been completely beneficial. Mill's utopia of an intellectual aristocracy reintroduces the despotism of reason; it is an "enlightened," scientistic version of the general incarceration of passions by Victorian decorum. With good logic—and in perfect agreement with all previous "Platonisms"—Mill's progressivism leads to fanatical elitism. The real theme of *On Liberty*, the Bible of nineteenth-century liberalism at its apogee, is just as much the progress embodied by the elite as it is liberty. Moreover, the Lockean problem of political liberty passes to the background: what worries Mill is rather the intellectual and moral tyranny of the masses, that "collective mediocrity." Letwin, who sees in this famous essay the classic formula of liberalism in the contemporary, American- and social-leaning sense of the word, is right. *On Liberty* is at the same time a defense of tolerance and a passionate justification of the enlightened liberal's duty to impose his views on the ignorant citizenry—precisely what most repulsed Hume and Bentham.[50]

I fear that the neoliberalism of our time is not capable of restraining this puritanical reconversion of the original "liberal" credo. In justifying liberty

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by the scientific need to preserve constant criticism (Popper), or in equating progress with a happy accumulation of practical knowledge which supplants nature without recourse to a plan (Hayek),[51] neoliberal thought does not sufficiently emphasize the specifically libertarian impetus of modern individualism. One could even hold that this individualism was more pronounced with figures like Keynes, that remarkable anti-Puritan.

What is at stake, let us emphasize, is precisely the fate of the liberalism-libertarianism connection. This connection remains, in my opinion, the guarantor of radical individualism. Not long ago, examining several varieties of individualism, Steven Lukes opposed the most characteristic French sense of the individualist idea, a sense connoting isolation and social dissolution, to its typical meaning in German culture, which connotes, on the contrary, the "organic" unity of the individual and of society.[52] It is evident that individualism as concern for individual self-development—the cult of *Bildung*, from Humboldt to Romanticism and from the young Marx to the Mill of *On Liberty* (which was inspired by Humboldt)—remains on the whole much closer to the German sense than to the Franco-libertarian sense. Genuine care of the self as a beautiful totality too often let itself unite with the more utopian view of the community. When, in the Belle Epoque, a leading "decadent" like Simmel praised an "individualism of difference," rid of any organicist holism, he was already a distinct minority. The "pursuit of excellence" took a course more and more distanced from the libertarian penchant for utilitarianism, in ethics and in politics.

At any rate, visceral individualism, for a long time the prisoner of the anarchism of the right (Stirner, Chestov . . .), today demands a theoretical relegitimation that is less anti-social than *meta-social*. If this relegitimation is to be achieved, it is certainly not through glorifying the community at the expense of the individual's free utilitarian calculus. *In this indirect but critical sense, anti-economism takes the form of anti-individualism.*

Finally, the third ideological repercussion. Here, economicide harbors disastrous consequences for the social sciences on an epistemological level. As we have seen, the empirically oriented sociological interpretation necessarily analyzes in terms of action. The paradigm offered by this analysis remains the ideal type of instrumental rationality: *Homo economicus* as analytical tool. We may thus conclude the following without any psychologistic (see Popper's situational logic, defined—against Mill—in terms distinctly anti-psychologistic) or atomistic bias: the famous "methodological individualism" is not applicable, this time in spite of Popper himself. Regarding sociological analysis, it is not so much necessary that the individual act *in a specific manner*; what is necessary is that he act, i.e. that he choose. This postulate is required by the interpretation of social action as

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regulated by roles, and to an even greater degree by the examination of action which is not regulated or is little regulated.

Veblen saw two distinct elements in Marx's thought: a logic of history, the Hegelian element, and a theory of class interest, the Benthamite element.[53] The doctrinal and political history of Marxism, one could add, has been in large part an alternation between these two key ideas: the revisionism of the Second International was Benthamite, the historiosophy of Lukács, Hegelian.[54] In the same way, in politics the Leninist revolutionary spirit, which liberates the concept of revolution from its dependence upon the maturation of the proletariat, broke with the "Benthamite" component, while Euro-communism tries, as it were, to restore it. However, for those who are not interested in dialectics or in its so-called logic of history, and yet remain sensitive to the explanatory merits of historical materialism, it is important to safeguard the utilitarian element, not the historiosophic one. For only the Benthamite element, analyzed in the sense of the social determinism unique to historical materialism, links Marxism to the mental universe of an empirical social science, albeit a non-empiricist one; only this component depicts itself, at least in its cognitive element (as opposed to the political element), as an inestimable *complication* of the logic of social action, because it strongly emphasizes the influence—the mightiness—of its contexts. Beyond that is the delirious realm of the concept left to its own devices, or even worse, bearing down with all its weight in the form of an ideocracy.[55]

It is certainly not immaterial that the attack against *Homo economicus*, direct or indirect, places in danger, in one fell swoop, two of the most cherished liberal values: individualism in moral doctrine and the concern for critical objectivity in knowledge. In the lived experience of humanity and in the life of the mind, *Homo economicus* has played, indeed plays, a role in the flowering of these values. Let us remember this before we let him perish.

NOTES

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5. Piero Sraffa, *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).
6. Karl Polanyi, Conrad M. Arsenberg, and Harry W. Pearson, *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economics in History and Theory* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1957) and Sarah C. Humphries, "History, Economics, and Anthropology: The Work of Karl Polanyi," *History and Theory* 8 (1969): 165–212.
7. Louis Dumont, *Homo aequalis: genèse et épanouissement de l'idéologie économique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977) [in English: *From Mandeville to Marx: The Genesis and Triumph of Economic Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977)].
8. The spiritual relationship between economic theory and utilitarianism is, of course, more of an "elective affinity" than a conscious affiliation. Naturally, Smith preceded Bentham (not Hume) and his own ethics, dominated the by idea of sympathy, was pre-utilitarian. In analytical terms, economics did not at all need utilitarian moral doctrine or its philosophy. On the other hand, the alliance between economics and utilitarianism, embodied in Bentham and the Mills, was also recognized by neoclassicists such as Jevons. On this topic, see Joseph Schumpeter's remarks in his *History of Economic Analysis*, ed. Elizabeth Boody Firuski Schumpeter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 407–9, 1056–7. Schumpeter, when he comments on Marshall's reservations about Jevons's hedonism, specifies that Marshall and Pigou also remained connected, at a considerable cost, to classical utilitarianism in their theory of *utilities and disutilities.*
9. David Seckler, *Thorstein Veblen and the Institutionalists: A Study in the Social Philosophy of Economics* (London: L.S.E./Macmillan, 1975), 92; my emph. Schumpeter follows the same reasoning (Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis*, 1057): value-utility theory is independent "of hedonist postulates or philosophies," for it does not prejudge at all the nature of the needs or desires which it takes as its point of departure.
10. Cf. Raymond Boudon, *Effets pervers et ordre social* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1977), ch. 7 [in English: *The Unintended Consequences of Social Action* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982).]
11. Dahrendorf (*The New Liberty*) speaks precisely of an "improving society."

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12. Cf. Robert Heilbroner, *Business Civilization in Decline* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976).
13. Dahrendorf, *The New Liberty*, ch. 2.
14. Gershuny, *After Industrial Society?*, esp. chs. 5 and 8.
15. This is Ronald Inglehart's thesis in his *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).
16. Cf. Rawls, 256.
17. See Brian Barry, *The Liberal Theory of Justice: A Critical Examination of the Principal Doctrines in* A Theory of Justice *by John Rawls* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973).
18. Cf. C. B. Macpherson, *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), chs. 4, 3.
19. See Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), ch. 6.
20. The Rawlsian attack against utilitarianism is found in two important passages in his *A Theory of Justice* (pp. 22–7 and 561–7). In the latter of these two passages, the crux of his criticism is the accusation that utilitarian postulates are contradictory to the unity of the self. Roberto Mangabeira Unger brilliantly handles this theme in his *Knowledge and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), ch. 1. Unger refutes liberalism through a critique of liberal utilitarian psychology.
21. Boudon, *Effets pervers et ordre social*, ch. 4.
22. Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 270–72.
23. C. B. Macpherson, *The Real World of Democracy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), 12–22.
24. Jack Lively, *Democracy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975), 34.
25. Kenneth Minogue, "Abstractions and Politcal Theory," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 3 (1979): 129–57.
26. Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *Technik und Wissenschaft als "Ideologie"* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1968).
27. *Id., Legitimationsprobleme.*
28. Cf. *id., Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1967) [in English: *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen and Jerry A. Stark (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988)] and *Erkenntnis und Interesse.*
29. Cf. Habermas, *Protestbewegung und Hochschulreform* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1969).
30. Cf. Raymond Aron, *Plaidoyer pour l'Europe décadente* (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1977), 120 [in English: *In Defense of Decadent Europe*, trans. Stephen Cox (South Bend, Ind.: Regnery/Gateway, 1977)].
31. On this subject, see J. G. Merquior, *The Veil and the Mask: Essays on Culture and Ideology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 67–70.

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32. Lucio Colletti, "Marxism and the Dialectic," *New Left Review* 93 (1975): 28–9. Colletti has taken and developed his critque of Marxist dialectics in his last book, *Tra Marxismo e No* (Milan: Bari, 1979).
33. It suffices to say that the distinction, which Sraffa deemed essential, between "basic" merchandise—the only kind worth using as a standard of value—and "non-basic" merchandise has no counterpart in the ordinary conception of unfinished and finished products. On this subject, Cf. Mark Blaug, *The Cambridge Revolution: Success or Failure?* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1975), ch. 3. But not everyone concurs that merchandise type plays a central role for Sraffa (did he not view it as a heuristic tool?); Marco Lippi, for example, rejected this conception. See his *Marx: il valore come costo sociale reale* (Milan: Etas, 1976), 115–18 [in English: *Value and Naturalism in Marx*, trans. Hilary Steedman (London: New Left Books, 1979)].
34. Edward Nell, "The Revival of Political Economy," in *Ideology and Social Science*, ed. Robin Blackburn (London: Fontana, 1972), 95. Joan Robinson—an important "bridge" between the works of M. Kalecki, Keynes's more "leftist" works, Sraffa, and the young Marxist-oriented economists—takes Sraffa's cue in emphasizing that "the rate of exploitation depends far more upon the bargaining power of the workers than upon the rate of profit and the capital/labor ratio": Joan Robinson, "Piero Sraffa and the Rate of Exploitation," *New Left Review* no. 31 (1965): 34. Claudio Napoleoni's expression "Sraffa's tabula rasa" provides the title for his article published in *Rinascita*, the PCI weekly, upon Sraffa's eightieth birthday (August 1978), subsequently published in English in *New Left Review* no. 112 (1978): 75–8. Pierangelo Garegnani's, and especially Alessandro Roncaglia's, contributions (on the Sraffa/Ricardo connection) also prove extremely interesting. Let us not, however, forget the evolution of Ricardo's thought on the problem of value: his proto-Sraffian intuitions date from the period preceding the *Principles*, then again from his last writings, while his principal work remains dominated by value-labor theory. Concerning Ricardo, consult Napoleoni's book *Smith, Ricardo, Marx* (Turin: Editore Boringhieri, 1970) [in English: *Smith, Ricardo, Marx*, trans. J.M.A. Gee (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1975)].
35. Cf. Ian Steedman, *Marx after Sraffa* (London: New Left Books, 1977), 14. On the other hand, according to Marco Lippi, Marx's value theory is based on a mythic "production in general," conceived as an essence which capitalist-style production, as a degraded form, opposes. This is the striking thesis of the work already cited, *Marx: il valore come costo sociale reale.*
36. Cf. Nell, "The Revival of Political Economy," 88.
37. This apsect was strongly emphasized by Sarah C. Humphries, *Anthropology and the Greeks* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), ch. 2.
38. See in particular Jean Baechler, *Les origines du capitalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971) [in English: *The Origins of Capitalism*, trans. Barry Cooper (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976)].

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39. Dumont, *Homo aequalis*, 14–15.
40. The commentators are not mistaken in this matter, to wit Vincent Descombes, "Pour elle un Franìais doit mourir," *Critique* no. 366 (1977): 998–1027, who relies (too heavily) on the Tocqueville/Dumont relation.
41. Cf. Dumont, *Homo aequalis*, 19–20 (on the "impasse" of political science).
42. The entire second part of *Homo aequalis* is devoted to Marx. Pierre Rosanvallon takes up the thesis of the individualist Marx placed in a "liberal plane" in his *Le Capitalisme utopique: critique de l'idéologie économique* (Paris: Editions Seuil, 1979), ch. 8.
43. Dumont, *Homo aequalis*, 1.
44. Ernest Gellner, "The Essence of Egalitarianism," *Times Literary Supplement*, March 10, 1978: 275. To Dumont's critique, Gellner opposes a much more materialistic analysis which emphasizes the technology of primitive capitalism, favorable still to the separation of wealth and power. This seems to agree with the latest historiographical commentary (see the status of this question as commented upon by Arthur J. Taylor, *Laissez-faire and State Intervention in Nineteenth-Century Britain* [London: Macmillan, 1972]), which is to say, essentially, with Victorian laissez-faire (Polanyi's market society). But does modern individualism, in this respect, depend on this brief historical digression?
45. Alan Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property and Social Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).
46. Dumont, *Homo aequalis*, 24.
47. *Ibid.*, 98–9.
48. Shirley Robin Letwin, *The Pursuit of Certainty: David Hume, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Beatrice Webb* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), esp. chs. 3 and 12.
49. Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 96.
50. Letwin, 308.
51. F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), chs. 2 and 3.
52. Steven Lukes, *Individualism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), 22.
53. Thorstein Veblen, "The Socialist Economics of Karl Marx and his Followers," (1906) reprinted in his *The Place of Science in Modern Civilization* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1919).
54. On historiosophy as the Hegel/Marx nexus, see Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), vol. 1, 70–80, 399–408, and his essay "L'antiutopie de Marx" in the book *L'esprit révolutionnaire, suivi de Marxisme: utopie et antiutopie* (Brussels: Complexe, 1978).
55. I borrow the term "ideocracy" from Raymond Aron, *Plaidoyer pour l'Europe décadente*; Giovanni Sartori, in his *Democratic Theory* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962), chs. 18, 2, linked this term instead to the democratic ideal.

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Susan Love Brown

BREAKING THE HABITS OF THE HEART

The authors of Habits of the Heart *believe that American individualism "may have grown cancerous—that it may be destroying those social integuments that Tocqueville saw as moderating its more destructive potentialities." However, because they come to their research with an anti-individualistic bias in place, the authors fail to acknowledge the role of either recent historical events or influences other than individualistic ideas in shaping American culture. An alternative explanation for the emergence of the isolated self and the incoherence of moral discourse in American life is presented. Both of these phenomena are viewed as temporary responses to a shift in American character.*

Individualism has been a dirty word ever since the French coined the term *individualisme* in the nineteenth century to label the horrific phenomenon that had overtaken their country in the form of a bloody revolution based on such radical ideas as individual rights and the rule of reason.[1] Anti-individualism was a reaction against the disruption of the established order which, although it had not done well by many of the people who lived under it, nevertheless had provided a sense of security—a security that was swept away with the onslaught of revolution. Since then, scholars have

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not been remiss in attributing the social ills of modern society to the specter of individualism, although they have not been equally diligent assigning to it any of the good. French thinkers were joined in this general lack of approbation for individualism by such figures as Edmund Burke, who declared that "individuals pass like shadows; but the commonwealth is fixed and stable."[2] Individualism is seen as the cause of alienation, anomie, and anarchy—the three big no-no's of social theory. Given the long tradition of hostility to individualism in some social science quarters, it is not unwise to be wary of academic studies of individualism, for the phenomenon itself has rarely been examined free of this original bias.

One such study, *Habits of the Heart* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), is the result of five years of research conducted in different parts of the United States by four sociologists and a philosopher: Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler and Steven M. Tipton. It is the kind of book Americans love to read—a book about themselves—and it is one that raises questions about the American way of life and especially about American individualism. It is a beautifully written book and, even rarer, a book that challenges both a popular and an academic audience. It is essentially jargonless and extremely humanistic in its presentation. Yet it is a book that, in the end, casts doubts on its own arguments and insights. This is not necessarily apparent until the final chapter of *Habits of the Heart*, when the authors move from description and interpretation to prescription.

The descriptive part of the book, which emphasizes how problematic life has become for Americans, provides a rich vein of observations. And while the interpretation is biased in favor of communitarian values, its key points are not without validity and are certainly worth contemplating by anyone who takes American society seriously. Most of the studies cited by the authors do substantiate the trends of which they speak, if not the interpretations they present. And the authors do succeed in providing the conditions for a "dialogue or conversation with fellow citizens about matters of common interest" (304) in this descriptive portion of the book.

However, the prescriptive concluding chapter exposes the authors' anti-individualistic bias and throws into relief some of the problems with the descriptive part of the book: its deterministic historical framework, presented outside of any evolutionary context and without reference to other complex societies, thereby rendering it culturally and socially myopic; its tendency to ignore the relationship between changes in the American view of self and the events of the external world that might have precipitated or influenced them; its view of individualism as the key causal factor in almost all social problems to the exclusion of more consciously prevalent ideologies; and its view of individualism solely as an ideological phenome-

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non, leading to a disregard of the instrumental role of individualism in the rise of complex societies and its structural importance in those societies.

In this paper I first summarize the authors' argument. Then I argue that the role of individualism in American life and in complex societies generally has been misunderstood due to the lack of an evolutionary framework, and I recommend distinguishing between individualism as a core value and as a motivating ideology. Finally, I suggest that the isolation of self and the poverty of moral discourse found in contemporary America are attributable to events that the authors ignore in their bold rush to condemn individualism.

Individualism and Private Life

In *Habits of the Heart* we are first introduced to four individuals who the authors say represent four different voices in American society. These voices will later be joined by others—all real American people who share "common difficulties . . . in justifying goals of a morally good life." This problem has to do with the inadequacy of "radical" individualism as a species of moral discourse, according to the authors. The language of radical individualism does not permit Americans adequately to express, define, or justify the desire for success, freedom, and justice. There are, on the one hand, biblical and republican and, on the other, utilitarian and expressive strands of individualism running like threads through the tapestry of American history and experience, which, the authors imply, is about to unravel. For the social context of individualism in the biblical and republican traditions—a context in which the individual is not at odds with but is realized within society—is missing in the newer utilitarian and expressive individualism, leaving Americans out on a limb, unconnected and dissatisfied but unable to reconnect.

Much of what the authors are concerned with has to do with the way in which Americans regard the self. Americans are raised to be self-reliant, and the emphasis on this value shows up in all stages of American life. The authors point to the way in which Americans leave their homes and their churches to establish "lifestyle enclaves" as they pursue their visions of self. Ultimately, they contend, the American self is ungrounded, isolated. The voices in *Habits of the Heart* seem unable to find a basis for the moral values that they speak of. There is no shared notion of moral goodness or of natural law. As the authors note, " 'Being good' becomes 'feeling good.' " Where duty and author-

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ity provided guidelines in the biblical and republican traditions of individualism, utility and self-expression—direct from utilitarian and expressive individualism—have taken over. Thus, while breaking with tradition and gaining new freedom for the self have many positive effects, they also create problems for Americans, according to the authors. "The question is whether an individualism in which the self has become the main form of reality can really be sustained. What is at issue is not simply whether self-contained individuals might withdraw from the public sphere to pursue purely private ends, but whether such individuals are capable of sustaining either a public *or* a private life. If this is the danger, perhaps only the civic and biblical forms of individualism—forms that see the individual in relation to a larger whole, a community and a tradition—are capable of sustaining genuine individuality and nurturing both public and private life" (143).

"There is a profound ambivalence about individualism in America"; embodied in the mythic resources of American society are characterizations of heroes that indicate that all might not be well—that in order to perform heroic acts, one must live on the margins of society or even outside it, like the cowboys who ride away or the detectives who uncover corruption in the society they are not really a part of. The message seems to be that "to serve society, one must be able to stand alone, not needing others, not depending on their judgment, and not submitting to their wishes. Yet this individualism is not selfishness. Indeed, it is a kind of heroic selflessness. One accepts the necessity of remaining alone in order to serve the values of the group" (146). Such a conception of individualism is "always just a step away from despair."

The sources of the ambivalence that many Americans feel toward individualism even as they espouse it can be found in the fact that even as they are told to rely on themselves instead of authority or tradition, Americans turn to the opinions of others to validate their own judgments, thus creating an "anxious conformity." This is inevitable when there are no other standards by which to judge one's own actions and achievements, the authors contend. "We strongly assert the value of our self-reliance and autonomy. We deeply feel the emptiness of a life without sustaining social commitment" (151).

Middle-class individualism is different from lower-class and upper-class individualism, which are "embedded in specific patterns of relationship and solidarity that mitigate the tendency toward an empty self and empty relationships," write the authors (152). The "empty" self, the product of the radical individualism that flourishes in the middle class, causes connections between people to become more difficult.

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The opposite of an "empty" self is a self constituted as part of a community. The authors use the term "community of memory" to denote the presence of a history and stories that reflect the past and a sense of commitment to the members of the community. In this regard, a community of memory is distinguished from the "lifestyle enclaves" in which the members have no common past or mutual obligations or sense of loyalty. A community of memory provides individuals with a "second language": that of tradition and commitment. The second language provides an "objective" basis for morality. Communities of memory are also a bridge between private and public life.

Individualism and Public Life

Americans are characteristically interested in joining together to help each other, the authors note. But it is difficult for Americans to reconcile the need for material success with the success that comes from helping others. In the past, the participation of Americans in their townships gave politics a role in mediating this conflict. Local self-government "gave them an understanding of public responsibility that transcended individual self-interest" (168). This kind of self-government was echoed by the personal side of business relationships. Thus, people identified morally with others within the same communities, and their conceptions of themselves were tied to their communities. However, the growth of cities made it more difficult to retain civic attachments.

Thus, the politics of community, in which a moral consensus is "reached through free face-to-face discussion," came to be eroded by the politics of interest, in which a set of neutral rules guides the pursuit of selfish goals and clashing agendas. But individualism makes it impossible to account for conflicting interests, the authors claim. "The limit set by individualism is clear: events that escape the control of individual choice and will cannot coherently be encompassed in a moral calculation. But that means that much, if not most, of the workings of the interdependent American political economy, through which individuals achieve or are assigned their places and relative power in this society, cannot be understood in terms that make coherent moral sense. It further suggests why, in order to minimize 'cognitive dissonance,' many individuals tend not to deal with embedded

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inequalities of power, privilege, and esteem in a culture of self-proclaimed moral equality" (204).

Americans, therefore, suffer from the problem of "invisible complexity." That is, they cannot put together a coherent picture of a whole society. The consequence of this is that there is a tendency to use the language of individual rights to stand for group interests, leading to the satisfaction of wants based on the power of those making the demands. A conception of the common good would require viewing society as a whole, but the "logic of individual rights" cannot provide this perspective. Consequently, Americans depend on leadership and expertise to replace community in controlling large and powerful groups—government, business, labor—in turn giving rise to a group of professionals, managers, and technicians who eventually achieve "administrative despotism." The only remedy would be to transform the current model of politics into one which brought "a sense of citizenship into the operation of government itself."

The authors delineate six oppositions that reflect different visions of the public good that predominated during the last century: the Establishment versus Populism; Neocapitalism versus Welfare Liberalism; the Administered Society versus Economic Democracy. The Establishment vision, which arose from the rapid changes in the United States between the late nineteenth century and World War I, held that private educational, cultural, and health institutions should be created by wealthy industrialists in order to "guide and harmonize social conflicts toward fruitful compromise through personal influence and negotiation" (259). The Populist vision of the public good belonged to ordinary citizens and insisted on their right to control their own destinies in democratic fashion. Both the Establishment and the Populist visions were formulated within the context of a national community and involved reciprocal relationships and the subordination of competition, both political and economic, to national society.

In response to the Great Depression, however, two new visions arose: Neocapitalism and Welfare Liberalism. The aim of society shifted to the provision of material well-being and physical security. Welfare Liberalism began with the New Deal and, according to the authors, was most successful between 1950 and 1970, when it "scored its greatest successes and created something close to a national consensus" (262). Neocapitalism was a critique of Welfare Liberalism and has, they argue, most recently been exemplified in the political rhetoric of Ronald Reagan. Both visions assume that it is the role of government

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to provide individuals with the means to pursue their goals; they differ over how, not whether, to secure justice for all.

The Administered Society and Economic Democracy, finally, are visions of a possible future, both of which recognize the need to mediate between what have been perceived as competing interests. The federal bailout of New York City engineered by Felix Rohatyn in the 1970s is an example of the Administered Society—an approach that takes advantage of new institutional arrangements and the cooperation of interest groups. Economic democracy strives to bring corporations under democratic control and would require a complete cultural transformation of American society, according to the authors.

The Transformation of America

Bellah et al. suspect that Americans' "habits of the heart" cannot satisfy their yearnings for meaning and coherence. In its pursuit of "freedom, wealth, and power," the American middle class has upset both the biological and social ecology. Along with its achievements it has brought us to "the very brink of disaster." This impending disaster is the result of a failure of social integration. "What has failed at every level—from the society of nations to the national society to the local community to the family—is integration: we have failed to remember 'our community as members of the same body,' as John Winthrop put it. We have committed what to the republican founders of our nation was the cardinal sin: we have put our own good, as individuals, as groups, as a nation, ahead of the common good" (285).

But the triumph of the kind of individualism present in the United States today is not yet complete. "The battles of modernity are still being fought," the authors declare. People are uncertain about what to do next. The promise of the Enlightenment that "freed us from superstition and tyranny" has been replaced by "fanaticism and political oppression." Science has led to potential worldwide destruction. The idea of progress has brought us to the edge of a precipice. Only "a renewal of commitment and community" can save us from "self-destruction." We are at an "impasse" and the way out is obstructed by our consciousness of separation.

Science—both natural and social—does not give us "a general interpretation of reality" but rather results in exclusive disciplines that thwart the integration of knowledge. This problem of integration extends to high culture, education, and popular culture, as illustrated

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by the inability of poets to speak beyond their "own feelings," the inability of education to instill "a general sense of the world and their place in it" in students, and the inability of the mass media—especially television—to communicate any "coherent ideology or overall message" to those who watch it. From television we get a world in which the choices are between "human decency" and "warm personal relationships" on the one hand and "material ambition" on the other. In the face of this, we are offered two forms of "pseudo-integration": personal success and personal feelings. "But a strange sort of integration it is, for the world into which we are integrated is defined only by the spasmodic transition between striving and relaxing and is without qualitative distinctions of time and space, good and evil, meaning and meaninglessness" (281).

Were the "culture of separation" to become dominant, society would "collapse of its own incoherence" or an authoritarian state would arise. But there are still countervailing "traditions that tell us about the nature of the world, about the nature of society, and about who we are as people" (281–2). That is, the biblical and republican traditions of individualism still provide a "culture of coherence" which is, however, in danger of "eroding" under the force of isolated selves. Thus, "if we are ever to enter the new world that has so far been powerless to be born, it will be through reversing modernity's tendency to obliterate all previous culture. We need to learn again from the cultural riches of the human species and to reappropriate and revitalize those riches so that they can speak to our condition today" (283).

Just as we are learning to "mitigate and reverse the damage" done to the natural environment on which our lives depend, we must learn to mitigate the damage done to the social ecology by modernity. "And social ecology is damaged not only by war, genocide, and political repression. It is also damaged by the destruction of the subtle ties that bind human beings to one another, leaving them frightened and alone. It has been evident for some time that unless we begin to repair the damage to our social ecology, we will destroy ourselves long before natural ecological disaster has time to be realized" (284).

The transformation envisioned by the authors cannot be "only in the minds of individuals" or "only from the initiative of the state." Large numbers of people would have to not only change but also take action, resulting in a social movement not unlike the civil rights movement. "If the civil rights movement failed fundamentally to transform the position of black people in our society, it was because to do that would

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have required just the change in our social ecology that we are now discussing" (286).

But the movement envisioned by the authors would succeed where the civil rights movement failed and would ultimately bring about "changes in the relationship between our government and our economy. This would not necessarily mean more direct control of the economy, certainly not nationalization. It would mean changing the climate in which business operates so as to encourage new initiatives in economic democracy and social responsibility, whether from 'private' enterprise or autonomous small- and middle-scale public enterprises. In the context of a moral concern to revive our social ecology, the proposals of the proponents of the Administered Society and Economic Democracy that we discussed in the preceding chapter could be considered and appropriate ones adopted" (286–7). The health of a society, the authors assert, can be judged by "how it deals with the problem of wealth and poverty." The Hebrew prophets, Jesus, and social theorists from Aristotle to Thomas Jefferson favor "a rough equality of condition" for a viable society. But the American dream—the dream of being successful and the center of adulation—contradicts the dream "of living in a society that would really be worth living in."

The authors believe that the transformation they envision would lead to the restoration of the "dignity and legitimacy of democratic politics, resulting in a new conception of the common good." There would also be a "new political atmosphere" in which success and failure would not be rewarded or punished so severely, leading to a reconceptualization of work "as a contribution to the good of all." Work would then become a matter of "intrinsic satisfactions." Wealth that comes from the unsatisfying work that is the product of automation ("a form of despotism") can be used to pay for "intrinsically valuable" work, such as the revival of crafts and "the improvement of human services." Granting workers more participation in routine work will help to relieve its monotony. "Work well done" and "the approbation of one's fellows" would become more important than "the accumulation of wealth."

Such reforms cannot be brought about by "expert fine-tuning of economic institutions alone" but require simultaneous changes on many levels, not the least of which would be the reassertion of the "idea that incorporation is a concession of public authority to a private group *in return for* service to the public good, with effective public accountability," and the creation of a true profession of management in which the "standards of public obligation" would be a part of the

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training. "In short, personal, cultural, and structural change all entail one another."

Communitarian Utopianism

Habits of the Heart should have ended with chapter 13 and its final question: "Is it possible that we could become citizens again and together seek the common good in the postindustrial, postmodern age?" (271). Questioning current American mores, finding a way to resolve the dilemma of the isolated self that the authors so eloquently describe, is a worthy goal but one that is much more complicated than is implied by the solutions they propose.

The events that have occurred since the appearance of the book suggest the futility of trying to heal the breach between individuals and the common good, if it exists, by means of naïve schemes of grand socioeconomic reconstruction. The authors seem oblivious to the vulnerability of their prescriptions to the anti-utopian arguments of Popper and Hayek. In the tradition of the Scottish Enlightenment, these critics point out that complex modern societies, the unintended consequences of innumerable individual actions that proved successful over long periods, are vulnerable to the mistakes that will surely follow attempts at global reform.[3] Moreover, the "ideological fanaticism" and "political oppression" that Bellah et al. abhor in the twentieth century have arisen largely in the context of schemes of social transformation similar to those they themselves propose.

Their treatment of the civil rights movement typifies their utopianism. Since the movement did not achieve the comprehensive results they think it should have, they deem it a failure. But the lives of black people in the United States *did change* fundamentally as a result of the civil rights movement. To deny this is to take a mere rhetorical stance for political purposes. Today in the United States—specifically in the American South—black people can register to vote, they can vote, they can elect black candidates to public offices, and they can ride buses and trains without segregated seating. Legally enforced segregation no longer makes blacks second-class citizens. The civil rights movement was not designed to perfect all the circumstances of black Americans' lives, although no doubt some of its adherents mistakenly thought that would be its result. When people attempted to take the movement beyond the specific problems its strategy and tactics were designed to solve, it disintegrated. Other problems of black people

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require other strategies and other programs, as many are at last finding out after many failures to resurrect the ethos of the civil rights era.[4]

A more fundamental problem with *Habits of the Heart* is that it never tries to understand individualism as a social phenomenon. The authors' view of individualism is prepackaged, standard-issue social science: the United States has been on a downward trajectory since its founding and what has occurred was inevitable, because individualism is evil. For all of their research and their denials that they bear individualism ill-will in general, the authors set out to find individualism wanting, and they succeeded.

What might they have found if they had not been steeped in the anti-individualistic bias of their profession? They might have realized that, first of all, individualism is not primarily an ideological phenomenon, but an instrumental one, requiring constantly renegotiated tradeoffs against psychological well-being; and, secondly, that even an exclusively ideational view of individualism ought to distinguish between individualism as a core value, theme, or character trait of a people and individualism as a motivating, dominant ideology with effects in everyday life. Other ideologies and events that may be responsible for the negative concentration on self and the rise of moral ambiguity in the U.S. are ignored by Bellah and his collaborators, who seem barely to have noticed the cultural revolution of the 1960s and the generation that caused it.[5]

Instrumental vs. Ideological Individualism

Instrumental individualism is the means through which complex societies solve the problems of production, distribution and maintenance for a large population. Instrumental individualism is characteristic of *all* complex societies, whether or not they have an ideology of individualism. But it is developed to various degrees and masked by various ideologies, depending on the particular social and environmental circumstances.

Failure to note the instrumental nature of individualism arises from the absence of an evolutionary approach in the social sciences, rendering invisible the connections between modern and nonmodern complex societies and Eastern and Western ones. An appreciation of the historical context of modernity and ideological individualism is not sufficient, for ideology arises after the fact. One needs a working

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knowledge of the mechanisms of sociocultural evolution to comprehend certain universal features of complexity.[6]

Instrumental individualism is a solution to the problem of environmental change (both physical and social) that results in sociocultural evolution. It is not merely an accident of history that individualism emerges as an ideology *after* the rise of complex societies. It has taken human beings time and study to comprehend what has happened to them and to their relationships with each other, to name this change, act upon it and codify it. In many instances, as the treatment of individualism among some scholars suggests, it has not yet found acceptance as a legitimate object of study.

The process of sociocultural evolution is one of change from a less to a more structurally complex system.[7] This change is generally agreed to occur because of a number of interrelated factors, including circumscribed geographical area, increase in population, and warfare.[8] Anthropologists recognize that several levels of society each manifest a different degree of structural complexity: bands, tribes, autonomous villages, chiefdoms, and states.[9]

Instrumental individualism is the process of individuation and separation that occurs when human societies increase in complexity—that is, when they evolve. Because an increase in complexity involves the differentiation of parts of society and their ultimate reintegration, forming a new level of complexity, it results in new relationships among people and often disrupts old ones. Instrumental individualism pulls individuals out of an old face-to-face pattern of behavior (Durkheim's mechanical solidarity), making possible multiple and overlapping affiliations among people and decentralizing decision making. The result is that society has multiple layers, multiple centers, multiple affiliations, and multiple connections crisscrossing each other, creating interdependence, and holding the whole structure together (Durkheim's division of labor or organic solidarity).[10]

An upshot of social complexity is an increase in human interaction and production that supports a still larger population by disseminating more knowledge through a greater number of transactions.[11] The specialization this calls for means more areas of knowledge can be delved into more deeply; the greater the connection among the parts of a society, the more that specialized areas of knowledge can benefit people at large without them having to have personal expertise. Thus, instrumental individualism is an enabling mechanism of complexity. It allows for the greater interaction of individuals in all senses. While it may disturb pre-existing social patterns, it is not inherently anti-

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society; rather it makes a much more complex society possible. If this process goes smoothly, new structures become integrated into a society; if it does not, a society may stagnate or even collapse.[12]

It is part of the paradox of human society that the general principles by which it operates are both generated by the action of individuals (based on their common human nature) and can be impeded by the actions of individuals (based on their values and erroneous beliefs). Human life is about living within our biological limits but also learning how to solve environmental problems. It is entirely possible for people to resist individuation and separation, but in doing so they will make certain problems insoluble. An understanding of the evolutionary processes of society and culture can help solve them.[13] Unfortunately, evolutionary processes do not always occur in a fashion that is optimal for the individuals they affect. Along with the rise of instrumental individualism comes a challenge to people's sense of well-being and their need to feel a secure sense of belonging. People have to find a way of reconciling themselves to individualism *if* they are going to live in complex societies.[14]

So, it might seem, *Habits of the Heart* has a point. But the normal feelings of separation engendered by instrumental individualism and complexity, which human beings have repeatedly found the means of assuaging over the centuries, are not the problems the authors are addressing. Rather it is the sudden disjunction between self and society and the concomitant incoherence of moral discourse and feelings of isolation that arose in the 1960s and 70s.

Any complex society will be home to many ideological currents. Some of these will have become ingrained over time in people's character and self-consciousness, but even when they set the parameters within which people act, they do not necessarily motivate their everyday actions.

In the United States, individualism is acknowledged as such a core value or theme, a kind of banner dragged out and raised now and then to confirm one's identity as an American and to provide a sense of continuity with the past.[15] But this individualism is a mixture of sacred values rather than a single ideology—a subtle blend of self-reliance, anti-authoritarianism, egalitarianism, and conceptions of rights and liberties that changes over time.

Habits of the Heart's neat distinctions between biblical, republican, utilitarian, and expressive individualism are too artificial to capture the reality of American individualism. There has never been a quiet moment in U.S. history when Americans really experienced the kind

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of community for which the authors yearn (and of which we all have childhood memories), an idealistic and nostalgic reconstruction of the past in which the seamier sides of community life are forgotten. Nor do the authors remember the impact of external and internal strife on the behavior of Americans.[16] They speak of individualism as if it were the conscious concern motivating Americans' behavior. I submit that in reality, American individualism is virtually irrelevant to the phenomena of the isolated self and of the lapse of moral discourse which have been especially evident in America in recent decades for reasons that lie elsewhere.

Mending the Habits of the Heart

The revolution that established the United States was followed by the constitutional crisis, the War of 1812, the Civil War, the insurgencies of native Americans, the rapid expansion of national boundaries, the incursion of the railroads, the influx of immigrants, the conflict of agrarian and industrial interests, the shift from rural to urban life, political corruption, economic upheavals, World War I, World War II, and countless other crises. Every time some massive change shook people out of their short-lived complacency, they responded by forming new religions or experimental communities, undertaking social reforms, adopting new ideologies, campaigning against their neighbors (sometimes lynching them), and generally trying to regain their psychological equilibrium in order to survive. What has come to be known as "the 60s" represents a continuation of this pattern.

The young people who would come of age in the late 60s were children during one of the most affluent and stable (but not untroubled) periods in U.S. history.[17] Out of the middle-class, suburban home where children were the center of attention and where they learned—from parents, church, school, and television heroes—to fight to restore justice, emerged the vanguard of the baby boom generation that would exercise the power of its numbers to confront American hypocrisy.

Thus, a massive cohort came of age ready to rebel, as all young adults think they must. They were characterized by an idealism, nurtured in the secure world of the 50s, which made the social problems around them intolerable: blacks were the victims of segregation, in spite of the noble egalitarian ideology taught in school; young men faced the real possibility of death in an undeclared war in a country

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that seemed peripheral to legitimate American concerns; native Americans had been driven off their land and were left to fester on reservations; women awoke to their lack of opportunity and highly circumscribed positions; demands for access to the good life by homosexuals, the handicapped, senior citizens, all seemed morally justified to the members of a generation who really had lived the good life and were prepared to be unselfish about sharing it with others.

These young people found the terrible gap between the ideal and the real intolerable, good reason to turn away from the notion of a single morality that worked for all people. Clearly, the absolute morality they had been raised with had failed them. They abandoned the symbols of this morality and the doctrines themselves and in so doing, adopted a relativistic attitude.

It is true that in the 60s, the sociocentric view of self that had prevailed in the United States—a view in which one's social role was seen as the source of one's well-being—shifted to a psychological view of self, in which personal fulfillment was seen as a source of well-being.[18] These shifts in the view of self were accompanied by a shift of social paradigms from a "giving/getting" paradigm, which characterized the parental generation, to a "self-fulfillment" paradigm.[19] However, these changes in and of themselves cannot explain the isolation of the self or the loss of a coherent moral discourse that arose later. They are consequences of the rebellion against perceived adult hypocrisy and the institutions that embodied it—including institutionalized religion—and the simultaneous "democratization of personhood" which led to a new tolerance on the part of young people and to a temporary, *de facto* moral relativism.[20]

"Do your own thing" was not the slogan of individualists acknowledging the rights of all. It was the slogan of young relativists acknowledging that one person's "thing" was as good as another's. The doctrine of individual rights was generally ignored because it was associated with the hypocrisy of the parental generation; the term "rights" now meant getting what one wanted, based not on any systematic moral underpinnings but on the assumptions that there was enough to go around and that each person could choose his or her own path to fulfillment.

It ultimately proves impossible for young people to live in such a relativistic world. It is too isolating and psychologically too unbearable, and almost from the moment this became the problem, people began to search for an answer in the usual American ways—they tried to start new communities, found new religions, drop out, and push for

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social reforms.[21] And now there are indications that Americans are returning to traditional churches, which shouldn't be surprising, since the members of the baby boom generation are now taking over the reins of power, raising families, and trying to find some stability in their lives.[22] This transition back to traditional forms of morality contradicts the picture of a society terminally ill with anomic individualism. The traditional forms of morality have been reconstituted along more satisfying lines—new "habits of the heart."

Nothing about either instrumental or ideological individualism militates against community. People have to develop common values on some level to survive, and common values rather than shared memories are the basis for community and society. *Habits of the Heart* ignores the fact that in a highly mobile society both family and social networks can function to integrate society as well as community, and that what we have in the United States are various combinations of human association that maintain social integration—and the voluntary association of people in the economic marketplace is not the least of these.

However, relativism *does* militate against community by challenging the notion of common human moral values. In an individualistic society with a highly educated middle class, a dominant ideology of relativism leads to the isolation of self as the logically fundamental unit of morality. Since each morality is considered legitimate to the relativist, each self becomes a moral isolate, and the death of community is complete, at least in theory. What makes relativism unviable in the end is the psychological necessity of human relationships and decision making. People simply cannot survive in a state of moral isolation. And so relativism, having had its brief heyday, must necessarily be eclipsed by a more viable, shared approach. Americans must grope their way back to moral meaning—as they have been doing.

NOTES

1. For an excellent discussion of the origin and historical context of this term see Steven Lukes, *Individualism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973).
2. Edmund Burke, "Speech on the Economic Reform" (1780) in *Works*, vol. 2 (London: The World's Classics, 1906), 357. Cited in Lukes, 3.

   However, F. A. Hayek defends Edmund Burke as a champion of "true" individualism after the fashion of the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment. Burke, says Hayek, was critical of "false" individualism, which had its origins in French rationalism and tends toward collectivism in spite of its individualistic rhetoric. In the confusion between the two kinds of

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individualism, says Hayek, Burke has become known as individualism's severest critic, when in truth Burke and Hayek both "stand in all essentials close to Adam Smith, to whom nobody will deny the title of individualist. . . ." F. A. Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: Gateway/Henry Regnery, 1972), 1–32. The close link between the rationalistic strain of individualism and forms of collectivism is further attested to by Lukes's historical discussion of individualism in France in *Individualism*, 10–12.

3. Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies,* vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 157–68. F.A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 55–71. Hayek's theory of spontaneous order, however, makes unintended consequences so important that they crowd out intended consequences; Hayek tends to neglect that people can successfully improve their societies when their efforts are well informed. Unfortunately, the remedies proposed in *Habits of the Heart* are not. Economic proposals should be based on economic knowledge.
4. To understand just how keyed the civil rights struggle was to the South and its particular problems of segregation, see Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987); Herbert H. Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, 1954–1970* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988); David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow, 1986). While the whole country picked up on the spirit of the movement and while Martin Luther King, Jr. became a nationally known figure, neither King nor the movement as a whole had the same successes outside of the South. In fact, one might say that the civil rights strategy consisted of using the rest of the country as a lever to move the South from its archaic attitudes to more enlightened ones. Segregation was the main problem confronting blacks in the South. Blacks in other parts of the country had other kinds of problems that did not necessarily fit under the rubric of civil rights. Poverty, for example, is an economic problem that requires an approach quite different from that of the civil rights movement.
5. At least one of the authors, Steven M. Tipton, has studied the 60s; his exemplary findings are presented in *Getting Saved from the Sixties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); the authors are also aware of the work done by Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka, *The Inner American* (New York: Basic Books, 1981) and Daniel Yankelovich, *New Rules: Searching for Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down* (New York: Random House, 1981), both of which pinpoint the very shift in self the authors talk about and locate it in a particular time and generation. But the authors are so sure from the beginning that "individualism" is to blame that they fail to notice the significance of this research to their argument.

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6. The most comprehensive book written on social evolution is C. R. Hallpike, *The Principles of Social Evolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), reviewed by David Ramsay Steele in CRITICAL REVIEW 2, no. 1 (Winter 1988): 111–43.
7. It was Herbert Spencer who first noted that evolution involved a change from a homogeneous to a heterogeneous state in *First Principles* (New York: D. Appleton, 1892), 431. Hallpike (15) differentiates evolutionary change from ordinary social change because of its directionality, and notes that it is "a process involving increased elaboration of structural forms."
8. Hallpike, 208–66. See also Robert L. Carneiro, "On the Relationship Between Size of Population and Complexity of Social Organization," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 23 (1967): 234–43; *id.*, "A Theory of the Origin of the State," *Science* 169 (1970): 733–8.
9. See Hallpike and also E. R. Service, *Primitive Social Organization* (New York: Random House, 1971).
10. Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: The Free Press, 1984).
11. On the subject of transactions and complexity, see Fredrik Barth, *Models in Social Organization*, Royal Anthropological Institute Paper No. 23 (Glasgow: The University Press, 1966).
12. There is now quite a growing literature on the collapse of complex societies. See Joseph A. Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) and Norman Yoffee and George L. Cowgill, editors, *The Collapse of Ancient States and Civilizations* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988).
13. I distinguish between social evolution, the growing complexity of relationships of the parts of society to the whole—in other words, structure—and cultural evolution, the growing complexity of the structure of knowledge or cultural understandings in particular. I should note that complexity refers specifically to the structure—the relationships of the parts to the whole—rather than to the content of culture. Some primitive societies that are structurally less complex have cultural content that is far more complex than that found in complex societies. See Hallpike, 277–83.
14. Generally people have been successful at this. However, things tend to go wrong when people in complex societies are faced with change that is too rapid. Often it is change rather than complexity itself that produces anomie or alienation.
15. See Yehoshua Arieli, *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964). Also see Florence Rockwood Kluckhohn and Fred L. Strodtbeck, *Variations in Value Orientations* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973) for a discussion of the difference between individualism and individuality.
16. The formation of intentional communities is an indication of attempts to deal with unsettling change. See Benjamin Zablocki, *Alienation and Cha-*

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risma (New York: The Free Press, 1980) for an account of community building, and Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements: Some Theoretical Considerations for Their Comparative Study," *American Anthropologist* 58, no. 2 (1956): 264–81 for a classic discussion of responses to change. My own earlier research was done at a religious community in northern California: Susan Love Brown, *Ananda Revisited: Values and Change in a Cooperative, Religious Community*, M.A. Thesis, San Diego State University, 1987.

17. For a description of the world in which baby boomers grew up, see Charles E. Strickland and Andrew M. Ambrose, "The Baby Boom, Prosperity, and the Changing Worlds of Children, 1945–1963," in Joseph M. Hawkes and N. Ray Hiner, eds., *American Childhood: A Research Guide and Handbook* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 533–85. For a demographic look at the baby boom generation, see Cheryl Russell, *One Hundred Predictions for the Baby Boom* (New York: Plenum Press, 1987). See also Susan Love Brown, "Babyboomers, American Character, and the New Age: A Synthesis," in Gordon Melton and James Lewis, eds., *Perspectives on the New Age* (Albany: State University of New York Press, forthcoming).
18. See Joseph Veroff, Elizabeth Douvan, and Richard A. Kulka, *The Inner American: A Self Portrait 1957–1976* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).
19. These are terms used in Yankelovich.
20. The term "democratization of personhood" is from Peter Clecak, *America's Quest for the Ideal Self: Dissent and Fulfillment in the 60s and 70s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 181.
21. The community I worked in, Ananda World Brotherhood Village, founded in 1969, was part of the search for meaning of the era.
22. For the effect of the baby boom generation on American religion, see George Gallup, Jr. and Jim Castelli, *The People's Religion: American Faith in the 90's* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 130–31. They note that 65 percent of baby boomers are church members, although boomers apparently attach less importance to religion than non-boomers do. It may be that confidence in religious institutions will never fully recover, but interest in religion per se seems to be rising.

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J. G. Merquior

IN QUEST OF MODERN CULTURE: HYSTERICAL OR HISTORICAL HUMANISM

[Modern culture is the culture of individualism. A confluence of historical forces brought this culture into being, making the task of pinpointing its birth as complex as that of specifying its causes. These are two tasks of historical humanism. A third is to trace the interplay of asceticism and romanticism within individualistic culture. But these scientific projects are preparatory to one of a different sort: a re-evaluation of the merits of modern culture in a way that avoids the dogmatic rejectionism, the anti-modern hysterical humanism, so prevalent among contemporary intellectuals. This fourth task requires receptivity to a more balanced, ironical appreciation of the mixed blessings of modernity, of a sort pioneered by Freud and Hayek. But a historical humanism would not rest with such conservatism; this would be a historicism without humanism. While appreciating modernity, we should appropriate the humanists' valorization of excellence in order to improve modern culture—neither rejecting individualism outright nor uncritically accepting its products.

—Eds.]

One of Edith Wharton's novels mocks the snobbery of the wealthy Newport ladies who always went together to concerts, lectures, and *vernissages*. It was, quips Wharton, as though each one of them were afraid to be left

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alone with culture. . . . Now I have always thought that using irony, indeed sarcasm is not a bad way to approach our subject. Like everyone in my generation, I was deeply struck by Groucho Marx's immortal reply: talk to me of culture, and I'll reach for my wallet. . . .

Let us try not to lose sight of this healthy spirit as I preface my considerations on modern culture by remembering with you the *culture concept story*. It is a story, I submit, in three main stages.

Historically, in effect, the first self-conscious meaning attached to culture—and actually using the word—was basically the idea of an organic growth of the self. In the humanist circles of classical Rome, the *topos* of self-cultivation meant something as dependent on ripeness, on growth towards maturity, as agriculture itself. Clearly Cicero's *cultura anima*, a translation of the Greek *paidea*, according to Werner Jaeger, built on this connotation. And the apt agricultural analogy was still in order when Bacon, at the end of the Renaissance, called culture "the Georgics of the soul." In our time thinkers like Hannah Arendt have stressed that culture cannot be brought about by fabrication precisely because it is essentially an organic formation.[1]

But it is an organic process hinging on the enhancement of *personality*. Culture is not just the outcome of a formation, rather than the object of fabrication. It is not just growth; rather it is a *perfective* self-growth. Naturally its subject is the individual. As Michel Foucault recalled in his last book, *Le Souci de soi*, Stoic philosophers elevated the ideal of a *cura sui*, an unselfish self-concern, into a subtle art.[2] Again in Cicero the synonym of *cultura* is *humanitas*—a normative end state of morals and manners, intellect and behavior.[3] Centuries later Chesterton was to say that mankind is not a tribe to which we belong by birthright, but a club to which each one of us owes his or her subscription. Such is the core of the humanistic meaning of culture. Those nice Newport ladies were much mistaken in their attitude towards culture, because as silly snobs they acted as though this vital, *perfective*, and highly *personal* element could be brushed aside or replaced by the sudden contagion of an occasional social rite. One can alienate oneself within culture, thereby denying the very nature of it.

Stage two in the meanings of culture came much later. Its cradle was the *Aufklärung*, especially the writings of Herder. Without obliterating the perfective dimension of the culture idea (for he defined *Kultur* as "the art of our species"), Herder started to see culture as something fundamentally *expressive*. Culture was now first and foremost the expression of the genius of a nation. Fighting the hegemony of French civilization, Herder stressed the particularity of each people and its spiritual manifestations, in other words, its culture.

Thus, instead of denoting just an achievement of the self, culture came

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to mean the attribute of a group. Hence, our modern parlance, whenever we speak of, for instance, German culture, bourgeois culture, medical culture, youth culture, modern culture, and so on. Therefore, culture came to be used in the plural: country, class, age group, or epoch all give you as many cultures or sub-cultures.

Please note that while the humanistic usage of the term *culture* had been at once individualistic and universalistic, its Herderian meaning tends to be collective and particularistic. One might call it the Teuto-anthropological meaning of culture, with romanticism, of course, providing the bridge between Herder's peculiar brand of *Aufklärung* and such post-armchair classics of anthropological theory as Boas, Kroeber, or Malinowski.[4]

What about stage three? Well, it has consisted in restoring the personal, individualistic bias of the old, humanistic meaning of culture, without dropping the stress on the expressive, rather than the perfective, element. I refer, of course, to the contemporary approach to self-cultivation based on psychoanalysis. Thus, after the humanistic and the romantic ideas of culture, we got a Freudian culture-concept. Like the humanistic one, it revolves around the individual, yet is definitely bent on the expression of rather than on the perfecting of the self.

Those who describe and deplore the narcissistic character of the modern ethos are not, I think, in error. Having reindividualized the sense of culture, yet made nonsense of its prior normative bearings, we seem to have become as rudderless in culture as in morality—at least judging by traditional standards. Moreover, the last stage in our sketch of historical semantics has itself been a powerful factor in the widespread devaluation of morality (which many equate with a dissolution of morals *tout court*). It has been noticed (by Gertrude Himmelfarb, for one) that while the Victorian evangelists held both religious beliefs and morality, and Victorian progressive intellectuals (the George Eliot-type) had lost faith but stuck to morality, their Edwardian successors of the Bloomsbury brand were the first to get rid of faith and morality alike. Now the point is, the final shift from high-minded atheism to downright hedonism, which is where we stay nowadays, was helped by a similar evolution in the idea of culture. Here we went from the humanistic *ideal* (never abolished, to be sure, by the rise of a culture-concept in the anthropological sense) to a "therapeutic" legitimation of a self-cultivation almost without ideals. Arguably, the first casualty in our ego culture may well be the superego in whatever form.[5] Dostoevsky thought that the truth of nihilism was narcissism. We begin to suspect that behind our narcissism there is but nihilism. No wonder if eventually we find ourselves ill-equipped to deal with Zara-

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thustra's burning question: "Who will hereafter raise high the image of man?"

Please don't fret: I swear I bring no new recipe for the *Übermensch*. My sole aim will be to offer a few remarks an (*a*) the historical nature and present predicament of modern culture, that is, of culture in our second meaning, as applies to modern society; and (*b*) the gist of some memorable humanistic reactions, by which I mean the reactions of humanist-intellectuals, to modernity.

The Roots of Individualism

Thus far, even the barest remembrance of shifts of meaning in the cluster "culture/self-cultivation" managed to land us in the moral problems of modern civilization. But, of course, this problem, in turn, is hardly intelligible if one doesn't bear in mind the driving forces that molded culture in the first place. Outstanding among them, as a mainstream in Western civilization, we find *individualism*. So much so, that some think it belongs exclusively to the West. It does not. If we take individualism to mean energetic self-assertion, then we have to admit that India—the realm of religious virtuosi, if ever there was one—was a culture fraught with individualism. For Hinduism is, indeed, as Nirad Charudhuri has so forcefully reminded us, a religion where spirituality is a pursuit not of beatitude, but of power, and where the best religious specimens, ancient as well as modern, were often superb egocentrics[6] (just think of the sheer strength of will in a personality such as Gandhi's).

However, as soon as we exchange the moral level for the *social* one there is no gainsaying that the spread of individualism was a Western phenomenon, besides being a key element in the modern ethos everywhere. Individualism has to do with a society where achieved positions prevail upon ascriptive roles; where personal ambition coupled with initiative is not frowned upon, while privacy is highly valued; and where one's allegiance to authority is more to leaders of parties or unions than to traditional figures like parents and priests.[7] Modern freedom is predicated on such a behavioral pattern, and in this solid individualism may be deemed the soul of social modernity.

Something so pervasive, and of such historical moment, could scarcely fail to stir diverse interpretations and contradictory appraisals. Individualism has long been both blessed and cursed in social theory, sometimes from implausible quarters. Thus, while Emile Durkhiem,

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ever concerned about social cohesion, praised it, taking care to dissociate it from anomie or social disintegration, a classical liberal like Tocqueville often employed individualism as a term of abuse, denoting either a corruption of aristocracy (as he did in *l'Ancien Régime et la révolution*) or a disease of democracy (in *Democracy in America*).[8]

I cannot, of course, dwell on the value-laden path of the discourse on individualism. Nor can I say more than a few words about its origins as reflected in thought. Since at least Hegel, the original blossom of individuality has been located in northern Europe, modern or proto-modern. Yet for two rather famous Basel Hellenists and *Kulturkritiker*, Burckhardt and Nietzsche, the rise of individualism was the mark of the Renaissance, and, as such, something born in Italy. However, the contradiction is more apparent than real. What Burckhardt and Nietzsche had in mind, and the former dubbed (in part two of *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 1860)[9] "the development of the individual," was to a large extent a trend in political and cultural elites. Hegel, on the other hand, was thinking primarily of a mass movement, the Lutheran Reformation. A fascinating chapter still to be written in the history of ideas would do well to oppose aesthetic fans of the Renaissance like Nietzsche and his master Burckhardt, the main creator of Renaissance scholarship, to the northern gravity of the greatest Protestant theorists of early modern individualism, namely, Hegel and Weber.

Recently the northern theory of the roots of individualism has gained the upper hand, chiefly owing to the revisionist labors of the Cambridge historian, Alan Macfarlane. In a seminal book, *The Origins of English Individualism* (1978),[10] and its sequels Macfarlane put forward the view that since the fourteenth century England was already in many aspects a modern society, because her peasants were non-servile toilers and rational calculators, evincing attitudes towards property and family that were strikingly individualistic.

Another brilliant piece of Cambridge scholarship, Jack Goody's *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (1983),[11] showed that in the age of Gregorian reform (eleventh century) the Church came to favor a new pattern of property and sexuality. By insisting on exogamy and stimulating celibacy, as well as encouraging marriage by mutual consent and freedom of testation, the Church helped create a situation in which landowners were actually enticed to bequeath their estates to God, to the detriment of kin groups. So the Church, by fostering the rise of individualism, ultimately dug its own grave—but

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not before recasting the face of Western culture in areas as concrete as sexual customs and property rights.

Historiographic researches like these place the roots of individualism much earlier than the Renaissance/Reformation watershed. Intelligent speculation has gone still further back. Franz Borkenau's thoughtful fragments on the origins of the West are a case in point. Borkenau laid stress on linguistic changes subsequent to the *Volkerwanderung*. Focusing on the diffusion of the "I-saying habit," the use of the personal pronoun before the verb in the first person, Borkenau discovered that it rose with the overseas migrations of Nordic tribes. This *Volkerwanderung* loosened the clan structure of Nordic peoples, allowing individualistic practices, such as the free following of victorious leaders. Significantly the use of the personal pronoun before the verb has *not* become a rule in Italy or Spain. Borkenau believed that such widespread changes betrayed the emergence of a Western individualism tinged with a deep sense of loneliness and aloofness, and leading to a *habitus* of interpersonal distance and respect unknown to "warmer" cultures. He made much of the fact that in English the original singular form *thou* was thoroughly replaced by *you*—a universal form of address, "protecting" the speaker behind a veil of impersonality.[12]

For Hegel modern freedom was incubated in northern, Protestant inwardness. Iberian peoples, by contrast, turned "outside." A curious paragraph in his *Philosophy of History* pays homage to the chivalrous spirit of Iberia, but only to add that instead of moving inwards, it went "out of itself, towards America and Africa." The implication is clear: conquest and discovery deprived Iberia of individualism. Macfarlane's "bourgeois" peasants, who are, on the contrary, so individualistic, are also staunchly "northern," i.e., English. As for the pious bequests interpreted by Jack Goody, they are not that confined. Yet although in southern Europe the Church does not seem to have eroded kinship as successfully as in the north, it was in the south—from papal Rome—that Gregorian reformism was launched.

Equally it was in the south of Europe that, centuries earlier, the Church first managed to harness ecstasy and religious athleticism—mysticism and asceticism—into monastic communities whose work had many a feedback on the lay society at large. Nothing can be more individualistic than a calling, but the Church, the *Western* Church, directed scores of rule-bound callings, thereby channeling individualistic drives into social purposes.

Christianity, in other words, was *innerworldly*. Maybe Borkenau was

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right, and we should look for the origins of Western individualism amidst the sectarian feuds of palaeo-Christianity. In that case, Pelagius (fourth century) is our man. By placing the problem of conduct—the dilemmas of sin, grace, and virtuous effort—at the heart of theological concerns in the West, he broke a new religious ground, a crucial ground that his great opponent, St. Augustine, was to consecrate as the core of Christian piety.

Louis Dumont sees Augustine as a watershed in the evolution of Christian individualism. While early Christian individualism was basically analogous to the Hindu renouncer ethos, with Augustine there began a subtle advance of potentially inwardly individualism within the framework of a theocratic vision.[13] This development reaches its climax with Calvin's theology of the will,[14] which unifies the field for active, in-the-world individualism. Oddly enough, in his treatment of the Augustian watershed, Dumont makes no use of the fact, recently stressed by historians of psychological ideas in antiquity, that St. Augustine can be considered the main originator of the concept of *will* as a faculty of mind, independent from intellect or emotion.[15]

Naturally one can also discern several proto-individualistic traits besides and before early Christian theology. Thus, while the Greek for *citizen, polites,* derives from *polis,* whose original meaning was citadel, the Latin form *civitas* was a secondary term, derived from *cives.* In other words, here the individual is prior to the collectivity, the very opposite of the *polis/polites* situation.[16] Again, while for Plato and Aristotle self-sufficiency was an attribute of the *polis,* later Hellenistic philosophy assigned it to the rational, individual mind.

At a much later, but still distinctly premodern historical stage, the high Middle Ages, there were also individualistic breakthroughs. In his remarkable book, *The Discovery of the Individual,* Colin Morris has detected many a theme of self-discovery and self-assertion in thirteenth century culture.[17]

A further development of the utmost moment was the birth of a proto-modern theory of natural rights. In order to answer the Franciscan "apostolic" revival of poverty ideals, the idea first arose that under the law of nature of God, man could have property as an individual. Technically this entailed an assimilation of *ius* and *dominium* and then, with Gerson (fifteenth century), of *ius* and *facultas,* so that *ius* could become, in turn, assimilated to *libertas.* Like Ockham one century earlier, writes Richard Tuck, Gerson "elevated the free will of both man and God together."[18]

The result of all this many-pronged advance of ethical ideals and

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rights ideas was a strengthening of individualism as an interface of concept and conduct. As a consequence, the Western faith was kept at a far remove from the trinitarian onto-theology of Byzantium. Western Christianity was perhaps less subtle, less sensitive to the baffling mysteries of the transcendental, or to the wealth of ritual symbolism, but its moral bite was sharper. In the West conscience and spirituality went together. The outcome was a tremendous boost to the social scope of individualism.

Protestantism and the Romantic Ethic

From this religiously motivated individualism there stem two important old faces of the modern soul: asceticism and mysticism. Weber famously explored the main upshot of the former: the Puritan ethic, bearer of the expansion of capitalism. But as his friend Ernst Troeltsch pointed out, the mystic element was no less decisive in the making of modern, liberal religiosity, beginning with pietism throughout the eighteenth century. For Troeltsch there was the Church, there was the sect, and there was mysticism, precisely the orbit of individualistic faith. Nowadays the sociology of modern culture strives to broaden this track. It often focuses on the romantic, not the Puritan face of modern culture.

The best recent study in this connection is, to my mind, Colin Campbell's *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (1987).[19] Campbell starts from changes in the Protestant sensibility. Literary history had long shown that by mid-eighteenth century the English middle classes were reinterpreting Protestantism in a sentimental rather than a Calvinist direction. Against the dour asceticism of the Puritan mind, this new piety saw in pleasure a natural companion of virtue and indulged in feelings of sympathy, benevolence, and melancholy. Sentimentalism set in, soon to be reinforced by the rise of the evangelical movement. Wesley, that hugely influential reader of Rousseau, stressed passion and prophecy, making the drama of personal conversion into a prototype of the romantic experience.

Above all, says Campbell, the emergence of a generalized romantic ethic gave birth to a new kind of hedonism. While traditional hedonism was an epicurean lust for sensory pleasures (in the plural), a pursuit of discrete moments of sensual gratification, modern hedonism is a preoccupation with pleasure (in the singular) "as a potential quality of all experience," and, hence, with something far more imaginary than

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real. Consumerism is the child of the romantic ethos, in that it is an intrinsically "self-illusory hedonism," characterized by a longing to experience in reality those pleasures created and enjoyed in imagination, a longing which results in the ceaseless consumption of novelty."[20]

If one accepts Campbell's analysis, then it becomes easy to understand how Bohemianism and consumerism, however strange bedfellows, tend to coincide in place and time, as they did in Belle Epoque Paris or contemporary California. Both are, in fact, the fruits of a rekindled romantic imagination, which can inspire intense idealism and unrestrained commercialism alike. And as in the case of the Puritan ethic, cultural developments gave a highly ironical twist to the ideological starting point—for obviously Wordsworth and Shelley did never countenance rank consumerism, any more than Calvin ever approved of the spirit of capitalism.

The theory of the romantic ethic starts from the recognition that Protestantism has been humanized (and modernized) by mysticism—in a process that shaped modern culture as much as that rationalization of the world brought about by ascetic capitalism. The work ethic built the modern economy and technology. But the romantic ethic makes them tick by dint of a perpetual, protean demand, dictated by modern hedonism.

Naturally there is a wing in social theory—roughly the "critical theory" school of thought—that denies the autonomy of modern hedonism. I shall come to that in just a minute. But for the moment I should like to point out that the very assumption of the romantic ethic thesis—that mysticism meant humanization—was by no means taken for granted only a few generations ago. That is to say, mysticism could very well be deemed an evil, not an innocent romanticization of the Christian creed. Indeed, this very view was upheld in a treatise called *Philosophie de l'impérialisme* (1903–08)[21] by a contemporary of Troeltsch and Weber: the Baron Ernest de Seillière (1866–1955).

Seillière saw every human activity as stemming from a basic instinct for expansion. History was fueled by "human imperialism," a sort of specification of Schopenhauer's Will. Now human imperialism he thought to be generally guided by *mysticism*, i.e., blind confidence and all its fantasies; and it is (when it is) restrained by reason—the sobering lessons of experience, preventing mystico-imperialistic drives from jeopardizing the self-preservation of individuals or groups.

As he considered cultural history, Seillière found that the control of the natural alliance of mysticism and imperialism came only late in

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social evolution. Such control had been essentially the work of the Church, as it managed to restrain the irrational surges of mysticism. However, with the progress of secularization, the balance thus achieved was endangered, and a fourfold bid for more mysticism was on the rise. Two of its forms were individual: mysticism passional and aesthetic. Two others were collective: the democratic and racial mystiques. Seillière was no integral pessimist, and he thought that, duly tamed, each one of these mystiques could do more good than evil, by promoting or enhancing, respectively, conjugal love, artistic freedom, social reform, and patriotism. Yet he feared that left to themselves they would prove baneful, and for much of his lifetime he worried especially about the mounting racialism in Germany.

Humanist Attacks on Modernity and Their Consequences

Let us take stock of what has been said up to now. According to Nietzsche, only that which has no history admits of a definition. Now culture is eminently historical. Hence, we have tried to understand the meaning of culture, and the problem of modern culture, by recalling the roots of the latter in the history of the West. Rather unoriginally, we found that individualism was the key to our quest; and we saw that the interpretation of mysticisms, both religious and secular, held, in turn, a clue to certain crucial traits of the modern ethos—of the culture, in our second sense, of advanced industrial society. Lastly, we've seen that the mystical element, or romantic ethic, can be the object of very different, indeed divergent assessments, as one realizes as soon as the ideas of Baron Seillière are compared to those of Colin Campbell.

Actually, even judgments on individualism itself, in whatever version, mystical or ascetic, vary a lot. Yet one thing seems sure: individualism *is* a pervasive and central ingredient in modern culture. No wonder if, in one way or another, the greatest moral thinkers of modernity, for all their glaring differences, have been stark individualists. This is as true of Kant and Bentham as of Kierkegaard and Mill, Emerson and Nietzsche, Orwell or Camus. That "one doctrine" Emerson said in 1840 to have been teaching all his life, namely, "the infinitude of the private man" could serve as a motto for all of these moralists, quite apart from their very different metaphysics.

Furthermore, there is a cogent sociological explanation for the pervasiveness of individualism. If the theme of personal autonomy is the basis of the modern ethos and the common denominator of modern

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ethics, it is because modern man alone *can live as an independent identity*. Premodern man or woman normally identified with hereditary roles. It is only in modern society that the *socii* identify with a language and national community, but are no longer prisoners of any given social position. In this sense an autonomous moral identity is a modern speciality. Premoderns were not yet role-detachable. Modern man is much more of a full (which does not mean a better) individual. This much has long been a consensus tenet in social theory. And that is why individualism is bound to be the glory and the guilt of contemporary man.

Hence, all the ambivalence it attracts. But on the side of negative reactions, I just want to mention, almost in passing, the animus of humanist-intellectuals. In the closing chapter of *Thought and Change* (1964),[22] Ernest Gellner perceptively linked the crisis-mongering of humanist-intellectuals to the archaism of their cognitive equipment. In the age of cognitive growth and universal literacy, the humanistic clerisy is a kind of antique. It no longer holds the monopoly on writing, and it knows that its expertise, verbal knowledge, is no match for the authority of science. One possible strategy is, therefore, to disparage this unfavorable setting by decrying modernity.

This path has often been chosen by philosophers, critics, and writers since romanticism. Historically one can discern two main varieties. One is the "revolt of the spirit," the protest of the "disinherited mind" (to quote Erich Heller) against the utilitarianism and materialism of modern life. It ran conspicuously from, say, Coleridge to Rilke, from Baudelaire to Eliot. The other is the revolt *against* the spirit—a far more radical, indeed nihilistic brand of humanistic *Kulturkritik*. It goes as far as to reject culture itself root and branch. Germany under the Weimar Republic provided outstanding examples of this, as in Ludwig Klages, Gottfried Benn, or Carl Schmitt, all foes of every positive cultural value. This was also the mood of Heidegger's destruction of metaphysics.[23]

Today even the humanist cannot escape the brunt of modern skepticism. Therefore, the revolt of the spirit is no longer viable; unabashed idealism is out. On the other hand, the revolt against the spirit went too far, as evinced by the Nazi stains on the portraits of Benn, Schmitt, and Heidegger.[24] So, gradually humanistic rejection of modernity developed a third position, at once less mystical than the romantic revolt and less nasty than the anticulturalism of the nihilist Right.

I propose to call it *Marcionism*. In the second century A.D., Marcion,

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a Gnostic preaching in Rome, held that the God of the Bible was an evil demiurge. Creation was a trap, from which Christ had come to deliver mankind. Therefore, the reality of the world was something intrinsically bad—indeed, worthless. Now in interwar Vienna the amateur philosopher of history Egon Friedell revived the term *Marcionism*, in order to label the extreme world-rejectionism of writers such as Kafka, Franz Werfel, and Gustav Meyrink.[25] Ernst Bloch and Georg Lukács during their pre-Marxist stage in Heidelberg borrowed Marionic themes explicitly.[26] The point is, for Marcionists, ancient or modern, the social world, its values, and institutions are just a messy rubbish, crying for thorough replacement by a good totality. Marcionists are never in favor of reformism, however bold; their passionate revulsion against the world as a whole demands nothing less than total rejection.

I think we should recognize that a great deal of Marcionism has entered the humanist mind in our time. The adversarial, hostile stance towards modern civilization, long detected in most modern art and literature by critics like Lionel Trilling or Harry Levin, is now a *fable convenue* amidst the humanist establishment. The modernist idea, made up of values quite at odds with those prevalent within the social culture of our age, has taken a fast grip on intellectuals at large. They are now often proud to indulge in modernity-bashing on an appallingly uncritical scale.

Their real target is not capitalism, let alone its social status quo, but industrial civilization in itself. Science, industrialism, and mass society are the *bêtes noires* of their ill-disguised elitism. Accordingly, their favorite philosophical currents, from the Frankfurt school to, I blush to say, deconstructionism, exude a *Kulturkritik* as absolutist as it is supercilious.

Now the self-righteousness of this anathema on modernity tends to be highly preposterous; and the more epigonic it gets, the more arbitrary it seems. Theodor Adorno, who indicted our age as "satanic" [sic] at least had Auschwitz close to his eyes. But those who insist on such abuse well after the downfall or discredit of totalitarianism are far less justified—and anyway the equation of modernity with totalitarianism was a blunder in the first place. By injecting a Marcionic pathos into contemporary, highbrow ideology, the radical intellectuals for Right or Left have only succeeded in creating a species of humanism that does scant justice to the glorious past of its genus. Let's call the bad species *hysterical humanism*, at war with progress and civilization.

Hysterical humanism gets sometimes coupled with violent, radical

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politics, in a kind of terrorist counter-culture. The resultant nasty mix has led to neo-conservative responses. People like Daniel Bell or Irving Kristol worry deeply about the cultural health of late capitalism. A younger neo-conservative, John Carroll, offers a model of cultural change, whereby Western culture, with its Puritan past now well behind, is about to slip from a "remissive" into a *paranoid* stage. In this paranoid cycle the more mature remissive human types are in danger of being stifled by large numbers of nihilist-delinquents (of the *Clockwork Orange* ilk) and visionaries (like Castaneda gurus or Heideggerian mystics). A typical ideologist of such shifts, weaving fabrics of paranoid aggression in pseudo-libertarian jargon, used to be R. D. Laing.[27]

The paranoid virus doubtless thrives in our midst. But the whole thing still does not amount to anything like an epidemic. What seems far more likely is that as long as our educational revolution goes on swelling the humanist-academe, there will be a ready-made public for professional hysteric-humanists who can very well make a career out of it. Nicolai Berdiaev once remarked that Heidegger was too scholastic to be a true existential thinker.[28] Yet this is exactly what we got: scholastic prophetism, though the thing is scarcely less repellent than the coming of those "culture philistines" disgustingly envisaged by Nietzsche. The "pedantocracy" of scholastic prophetism, feeding on the Marcionism of our humanist clerisy, is by now quite well entrenched.

Now it is my belief that the anti-modern pathos of contemporary humanists ends up by undermining the vitality of culture, also as a humanistic achievement, in our midst. A high culture that so often indicts the social culture where it lives—and off which it lives—not only threatens to strain modern culture (in the anthropological sense), it also creates too unbalanced an idiom for self-cultivation. Hysterical humanism can scarcely be a broad, sound basis for the growth of that synthesis of knowledge and wisdom that is the mark of the cultured (as against the merely learned).

Ironically our scholastic prophetism is often too little scholarly. The theoretical and methodological craze now rampant in the humanities can hardly disguise the fact that the level of humanistic training, following the rash dismissal (and silly denigration) of philology and other traditional disciplines of scholarship, has simply fallen too low. Literary and philosophical teaching, in particular, often swarms with humanist-illiterates. They seem the perfect illustration of what Young (in "The Love of Fame") once wrote of librarians:

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> Unlearned men of books assume the care
> As eunuchs are the guardians of the fair.

The other side of traditional, humanistic education was, of course, a good acquaintance with the arts, verbal or otherwise. However, in the present condition of our culture, the aesthetic province seems to be in a sorry state. The prophecy of Seillière—that we would witness the "imperialist" rise of aesthetic mysticism—came quite true. But imperialistic aestheticism imposed a modernist cult of arch-experimental art whose chief result often is, if I may be blunt, meaningless works or texts, where intelligible form is the first casualty of technical invention. The epigonic ritualization of modernism has blurred the borderline between the metamorphic (to use Harry Levin's perceptive term) and the simply amorphous.

To be sure, we have come to realize that most art is nowadays essentially an *idea* of art, or of a given art or genre, in both its norm and its infringement. Artworks have become art theory incarnate; for our art is sovereignly philosophical. It is, as Arthur Danto would say, philosophically enfranchised.[29] But the problem is, how *actually* incarnate is it? How intelligibly translated into form or syntax? Let's confess it: more often than not, very little indeed. Obscurity and pointlessness pervade the art world.

Naturally they prosper with the full complicity of many of its custodians, such as museum bigots and literary academics whose status is enhanced by their august fondness for cracking aesthetic codes and idiolects. Yet it is high time we stop making "reverential concessions to modernist difficulty," as Richard Poirier puts it; and that we also put an end, again to quote Poirier, to the idea that frantic innovation in the arts, the "central mythology" behind the difficulty cult, is a sign of cultural heroism.[30]

Now that historical modernism is a canon—a body of important works whose stylistic maturity and moral maturation begin to be cogently explored (as they are by Ricardo Quinones in his remarkable book, *Mapping Literary Modernism*),[31] we should ponder some wise warnings about the exhaustion and growing sterility of the vanguard myth. The main warners are not philistines but genuine lovers of (indeed, contributors to) creation. They include Claude Lévi-Strauss, the closest friend of art anthropology has had since Sapir, whose strictures on the penury of abstract painting and its successor styles are now getting the serious attention they deserve,[32] and also the late Eugenio Montale.

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Probably the best Italian poet since Leopardi, Montale saw fit to warn that every "art which destroys form while claiming to refine it denies itself its second and larger life: the life of memory and everyday circulation."[33] In other words: willful hermeticism kills the cultural powers of art. The symbolists had severed poetry from prose. But many later movements severed poetry from recognizable meaning, thereby preventing literature from reaching the social memory.

Fragment-mongering in our arts blindingly obeys an aesthetics of disintegration. Insofar as it means an atomization of language, one can quibble over it. Elias Canetti in his memoirs has Musil say that Joyce's verbal technique was old-fashioned because it derived from an obsolete psychology: associationism.[34] But the real trouble with the aesthetics of disintegration is that it actually disintegrates the social function of art. And if Montale is right, as I believe he is, then the loss of memorability further wrecks the humanistic value of great art. For the normal, would-be cultivated person cannot but be insensitive before the amorphousness, the meaninglessness of much "advanced" art and literature. Thus, we may say: through imperialistic aestheticism, art fails culture.

Historical Humanism and Modern Culture

"Men are not gentle creatures. . .; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness." Freud's message in *Civilization and Its Discontents* is clear enough: for civilized life to exist, we have to surrender most of our instinctual drives. Civilization depends less on freedom than on renunciation. We find an echo of this in the cultural history of Norbert Elias (*The Civilizing Process*, 1939),[35] for whom civilization was tantamount to a shift from social constraints to self-constraint (*Selbstzwant*).

From another point of view, however, civilization rests on the supersession, or at least a sustained overcoming, not just of our low, beastly instincts but, on the contrary, of our very *social* impulses. Or so tells us another Viennese master, Friedrich Hayek. In his view in order to create and maintain a social order susceptible of constant growth and frequent improvement, man had not only to submit to instinctual sacrifices, but also had to drop "many sentiments that were good for the small band," such as innate tendencies to act together in pursuit of common goals.[36] For civilization, says Hayek, is an "abstract society,"

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resting far more on learnt rules than on pursuing common objects. The working of its best embodiment on an evolutionary account—the market—implies a respect for rules, but not any spontaneous solidarity.

The macro-historical meaning of this stands all too clearly; primitive man must be seen as *oversocialized*—a chummy fellow, too gregarious, no matter how violent; and, as such, unfit for the cold manipulation of rules that distinguishes members of the abstract society. Therefore, the march of civilization presupposes, besides instinctual control, a good measure of distance from "tribal" feelings, from community and commonality, in sum, from *Gemeinschaftslust*.

Freud's and Hayek's perspectives are not contradictory. They are complementary. Significantly Freud was highly suspicious of chummy ethics. In chapter eight of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, casting a critical eye on Romain Rolland's "oceanic" gospel of brotherhood and universal love, he showed that such noble feelings often have a self-serving, narcissistic basis. This buttresses my point: Freud's and Hayek's views on primal instincts can be construed as two complementary perspectives.

Yet neither seems acceptable without considerable uneasiness. We would like to give reason to Rousseau against Freud, seeing instinctual man as a *bon sauvage* rather than as a thug. And we would prefer to side with Kropotkin against Hayek, assuming that civilization is the height of free cooperation over common aims; not a cold, abstract society, but a warm, shared common endeavor. Alas, their very going against our flattering self-images lends credibility to these two Viennese views. But Hayek's is the one that finds more resistance.

Take Chesterton, for instance. In an essay for *Vanity Fair* in 1921, he complained that modern society (Hayek's civilization) is based neither on communion nor on convention but on mere coincidence—the sheer coincidence that obtains when four men meet by chance by the same lamppost, one to paint it, one to read a newspaper, one because he is expecting his girlfriend, and the other simply to embrace it "in a fit of alcoholic enthusiasm." Comments Chesterton: modern society unwisely assumes that men will go on indefinitely doing the same things (i.e., get by the lamppost) for so many different reasons. But obviously coincidences are far less steady than acts of communion or even of convention. Consequently modern society is "intrinsically insecure."[37]

A very ingenious simile—only this time my dear Chesterton got it wrong. For actually modern society is not just made up of coinci-

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dences (owing to individualism). It consists of a myriad of coincidences, to be sure; but they are coincidences *permeated by rules*, that is to say, by conventions, as Hayek suggests. The frequent convergence of different interests within a framework of shared norms (not aims) ensures a social order stronger and more stable than earlier social formations. As predicted by Saint-Simon, industrialism brought about stability (it is only *industrialization* that can bring upheavals); but it did it by the most un-Saint-Simonian of reasons: the operation of rule-bound individualism.

No doubt modern culture is also a culture of disappointment. The main causes of this were grasped by my regretted friend and master, Raymond Aron. Modern society holds an egalitarian promise, yet works through technical hierarchies and meritocratic avenues of access. Again, it licenses self-expression, yet spreads and requires unprecedented degrees of cultural homogenization.[38] As such, it is bound to disappoint its naturally liberatarian denizens. They, as good individualists, entertain *en masse* aspirations without parallel in the olden times. It is hard to bend their souls to the wisdom of Pindar, who scorned (I'm quoting from memory)

> The wild madness of desires beyond reach.

But the question is: do such structural constraints cancel the many social and moral advantages of modern life? Hysterical humanism doesn't stoop to answer. A *historical* humanism does—and it vindicates, in however qualified a way, the culture of modernity. In the halcyon days of the Belle Epoque, Georg Simmel famously depicted a "tragedy of culture." To him "objective culture," that is to say, the glut of objects, signs, and forms available as means to human expression, was such that it was prevailing too much over "subjective culture," the ever more fragmentary life-content of modern individualists.

Nevertheless, his contemporary Célestin Bouglé thought otherwise. A liberal Durkheimian, Bouglé introduced (in 1914) the concept of "*polytelism*." To his eyes modern society is as inclined to the differentiation of values and ideals—of ends—as it is given to economic specialization. Still, the differentiation of ends does not jeopardize social unity, because many different goals may be reached through the same means. Simmel worried about the preponderance of means over subjective ends. Bouglé took a brighter view of things, because for him individualism multiplies ends, while shared means—Hayek's shared

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rules—underpin social order without curtailing variety, which is the soul of liberty.[39]

Mainstream humanism never paid attention to Bouglé. By contrast, Simmel has been tremendously influential, since he paved the way for Weber, and especially since he became a conceptual pillar of that fountainhead of Western Marxism, the work of the young Georg Lukács. The young Lukács reinterpreted the Marxist concept of alienation in strongly Simmelian terms. Thus, we are all Simmelians now: we firmly deplore the "domination of means."

Moreover, impatient with the constraints of industrial society and prone to paranoid/visionary urges, we long for escape from our rational culture. Affluence, automation, more leisure, the rise of the service economy, and the ever-easier use of machines add up to a situation where, as Gellner has it, "the activities requiring Cartesian thought are diminishing (both as a proportion of the population and as a proportion of the time of individuals), whilst the activities calling only for easy, intuitive responses are increasing.[40] So, "romantic" behavior is bound to be widespread in modern culture.

We saw that for completing the latter's genealogy we need to complement Weber's stress on asceticism with an equal focus on mysticism and the romantic ethic. Now we see that Weber's celebrated thesis of the "rationalization" of culture also calls for qualification. Modern culture is both rational *and* romantic, though the relation (in Gellner's phrase) is highly ironical, since all the romantic binges proffered by the counter-culture (and soon commercialized) do depend on the rational basis of the self-same culture they profess to scorn.[41]

Here critical thinking would only require two things. First, that our neo-romantics acknowledge the irony of the situation, instead of trying to collapse humanistic thought into modernity-bashing. The *Kulturpessimismus* of our intellectuals has really gone too far, in the sense that it is too little warranted by the facts of modern history. And anyway, as John A. Hall has aptly said, "Intellectuals have a duty not to write their own hopes and fears into their vision of society, as seems to have happened too frequently in the modern era.[42]

Second, and by the same token, it would be advisable that our humanist-majority cease to subscribe to the silly Marcusean portrayal of the common man as a moral zombie. For, as writes sociologist Randall Collins,

> people in capitalist society are on the average probably no more alienated than people were in most other types of society. One might even

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> make out a case that they spend *more* of their daily hours in meaningful activities than their forebears did. The reason is precisely the "commercialized" culture that now exists. For meaning does not emerge automatically. . . . It is often asserted that modern life has robbed us of the rich tapestry of daily ceremonial that give meaning to premodern society. But I think that almost diametrically the opposite is the case. What modern intellectuals usually fail to see is that the technology of ritual-production has gotten much more decentralized. People who carry around cassette recorders or radios blaring out popular music are literally wrapping themselves in a cocoon of self-chosen meaning almost every moment of the day; in premodern society they were subject to the authoritarian scheduling of religious ceremonial, at which attendance was not free but enforced.[43]

Humanism—culture in our first sense—was never meant, as a whole, to despise the Everyman. Its purpose has always been qualitative, selective individualism, not elitism. Above all, it has always implied a sense of excellence. Of the ancients it was said that they only cared to do what deserved to be written and only cared to write what deserved to be read. Thus, there was a cult of quality and greatness—a search for glory resting on excellence. We moderns, by contrast, worship efficiency, live by evidence, and cherish expression. But in many ways we seem to have a dimmer sense of excellence, at least as an object of moral and cultural institutionalization.

In spite of so many flaws and evil propensities, human nature appears to contain a kind of tropism toward the better. Man is far from constantly seeking the good; but almost never fails, if only by evincing envy, eventually to acknowledge the best. Narcissism tends to be nihilistic precisely because it goes against this *aristocentric* impulse.

Culture, on the other hand, culture in its perennial, however changing, humanistic meaning as an improvement of the self, thrives on a grasp of values and a love for excellence. Now to us moderns there can be no culture, in the social meaning, without humanism; for modernity is the first civilization without the automatic pilot of tradition. It is more difficult for us to be molded solely by the social culture than it was for our premodern ancestors. When our century was young, modernist thinkers like Ortega y Gasset, sick and tired of Victorian culture-worship, invited modern man to go from culture to "life." Now we know better. We have learned that before the danger of a new barbarism in mind and manners, in art and politics, it behooves us to march once again from life to more culture. There is a possible answer to Zarathustra's burning question, "Who will lift hereafter the image of

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man?" The answer is a modern humanism, able to provide at the same time a modernization of culture and a humanization of modern life through culture. This is, I'm afraid, no big news—but it's the best we can do. At any rate, it's all I can say to you for the moment.

NOTES

1. Cf. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking, 1968), ch. 6, ii.
2. Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 3: *Le souci de soi* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984) [in English: *The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1986)]; commented upon in J. G. Merquior, *Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), ch. 9.
3. Cf. Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris: Payot, 1938), 552–4.
4. On the shift from the humanistic to the romantico-anthropological concept of culture, see J. G. Merquior, *The Veil and the Mask: Essays on Culture and Ideology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), ch. 2.
5. This can, though, be considered too much of an "id perspective." For a qualifying view, see two books by Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, first American ed., 1966), and *Fellow Teachers* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973). But Rieff is thinking of "cultural superegos" (see *Triumph*, ch. 3) rather than of the individual one.
6. Cf. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, "The Paradox of Hindu Spirituality," *Encounter* (March 1979). Even Louis Dumont, the distinguished Hinduist writing on individualism, acknowledges from the outset that Hindu "renouncers" were individualists, though of a strictly outworldly kind: cf. his *Essays on Individualism: Modern Ideology in Anthropological Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). [On *Essays on Individualism*, see J. G. Merquior, "For the Sake of the Whole," CRITICAL REVIEW 4, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 301–25.]
7. On the individualist syndrome, see Alex Inkeles, *Exploring Individual Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
8. For Tocqueville on individualism, see Jean-Claude Lamberti, *Tocqueville et les deux démocraties* (Paris: PUF, 1983), ch. 7.
9. [Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1892).]
10. [Alan MacFarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).]
11. [Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).]
12. Franz Borkenau, *End and Beginning: On the Generation of Cultures and the*

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Origins of the West, ed. Richard Lowenthal (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

13. Cf. Dumont, *Essays on Individualism*, 38–44.
14. *Ibid.*, 52–9.
15. On the Augustinian concept of will, see the work of the Heidelberg classicist Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 125–44.
16. Cf. Emile Benveniste, *Le Vocabularie des institutions indo-européennes* (Paris: Minuit, 1969), t. 1, p. 367.
17. Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).
18. Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories: Their Origin and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), esp. ch. 1; quote from p. 30.
19. [Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).]
20. *Ibid.*, 203–5.
21. [Ernest de Seillière, *Philosophie de l'impérialisme* (Paris: Plon Nourrit et cie, 1908).]
22. [Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).]
23. Cf. Karl Löwith, *Mein Leben in Deutschland yor und nach 1933* (Stuttgart: Metzlersche und Poeschel, 1986).
24. On the Nazism of Heidegger, see J. G. Merquior, "Heidegger: más allá del nazismo," *Vuelta* no. 142 (September 1988): 55–61.
25. On Friedell and Marcionism, see William Johnston, *The Austrian Mind: An Intellectual and Social History 1848–1938* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).
26. Cf. J. G. Merquior, "From Marcionism to Marxism," CRITICAL REVIEW 2, no. 4 (Fall 1988): 101–13. Bloch and especially Lukács are also discussed in J. G. Merquior, *Western Marxism* (London: Paladin, 1986).
27. John Carroll, *Puritan, Paranoid, Remissive: A Sociology of Modern Culture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), ch. 6.
28. Nicolai Berdiaev, *Essai d'autobiographie spirituelle* (1949) (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1958), 129–31.
29. Arthur Danto, *The Philosophical Disfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).
30. Richard Poirier, *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections* (New York: Random House, 1987), 105–6, 112.
31. Ricardo J. Quinones, *Mapping Literary Modernism: Time and Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).
32. For a comment on Lévi-Strauss's attack on modernist ideology, see J. G. Merquior, *From Prague to Paris: A Critique of Structuralist and Post-Structuralist Thought* (London: Verso, 1986), 83–8.

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33. Eugenio Montale, *The Second Life of Art*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Galassi (New York: Ecco Press, 1982).
34. Cf. Elias Canetti, *The Play of the Eyes*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1986), 168.
35. [Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon, 1982).]
36. F. A. Hayek, "The Three Sources of Human Values," London School of Economics, 1978. Ernest Gellner comments on this in his *Plough, Sword, and Book: The Structure of Human History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 26–8.
37. The Chesterton article is quoted and criticized in Charles Frankel, *The Case for Modern Man* (New York: Harper, 1955), ch. 5.
38. Raymond Aron, *Progress and Disillusion: The Dialectics of Modern Society* (New York: Praeger, 1968).
39. On Bouglé, see W. Paul Vogt, "Un durkeheimien ambivalent: Celestin Bouglé," and William Logue, "Sociologie et politique: le liberalisme de Célestin Bouglé," in *Revue francaise de sociologie* 20 (1979): 123–39, 141–61. For the concept of polytelism, see Bouglé, *Leçons de sociologie sur l'évolution de valeurs* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1922).
40. Ernest Gellner, *Culture, Identity, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), ch. 10; quote from p. 155.
41. For the concept of ironic cultures, see Gellner, *Legitimation of Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 191–5.
42. John A. Hall, *Liberalism: Politics, Ideology and the Market* (London: Paladin, 1987), 94.
43. Randall Collins, *Weberian Sociological Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 254.

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Gregory R. Johnson

A FRIEND OF REASON: JOSÉ GUILHERME MERQUIOR

This essay surveys and assesses J. G. Merquior's principal English-language contributions to liberal social and political theory. The greatest strength of Merquior's work is his recognition that one can neither understand nor defend liberalism without first understanding and defending modernity. The greatest weakness of Merquior's work is his overly oppositional conception of the relationship between modernity and its postmodern critics, particularly his failure to recognize that both the positive and negative features of postmodernism are simply radicalizations of the positive and negative features of modernity itself. It is argued that the strengths of Merquior's work are best affirmed and its weaknesses best overcome by appropriating it within the context of a "critical modernist" approach to understanding and legitimizing the institutions and practices characteristic of modernity and liberalism.

To read a book or an essay by José Guilherme Merquior is to be made painfully aware of the parochialism and narrowness of American academic and literary culture. Merquior was a radical individualist, a liberal in the classical tradition. Along with Hayek, Merquior was also one of the handful of contemporary classical liberals to venture beyond the narrow con-

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fines of Lockean rights theories and free-market economics to study the historical roots and cultural dynamics of capitalism and modernity. Merquior is best described as an intellectual historian—not only because his method is largely historical, but also because his interests so strikingly combine cosmopolitan breadth and historical depth that the only rubric which can encompass them is: Spirit, in all of its manifestations. The breadth of Merquior's interests is equalled only by the elegance and wit of his writing and by his amazing productivity: twenty books and dozens of essays, articles, and reviews—many of them quite substantial contributions to scholarship—written in five languages during a working life of about 25 years, many of which were also spent pursuing a diplomatic career.

Merquior's writings loosely fit into three broad categories. First is aesthetics and criticism, literary and cultural. These works are by far the most numerous but least accessible to North American and European readers, written as they are largely in Portuguese and published in Brazil.[1] The second category is politics and social policy, particularly of Latin America.[2] The third category can best be described as interdisciplinary social theory, which includes Merquior's best known and most accessible English-language works—*Rousseau and Weber, The Veil and the Mask, Foucault, Western Marxism, From Prague to Paris*, and *Liberalism Old and New*—treating such topics as the sociology of modernity, ideology, and legitimacy; the philosophy of history and of the human sciences; and liberal political theory.[3] In this essay, I shall deal only with the third category of works, focusing specifically on several of the books.

In Defense of Modernity

Merquior's work is unified by several methodological constants as well as an animating intellectual concern best described as *a sustained defense of modernity*—social, political, and intellectual. The positive aspects of this defense can, for the most part, be found in three books: *Rousseau and Weber: Two Studies in the Theory of Legitimacy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980; henceforth cited as RW); *The Veil and the Mask: Essays on Culture and Ideology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); and *Liberalism Old and New* (Boston: Twayne, 1991; henceforth cited as LON).

Merquior's conception of modernity—deeply influenced by such theorists as Hegel, Weber, and Gellner—is essentially that of the Enlightenment. Modernity is a cultural movement characterized by the progressive social concretization of *reason* and *freedom*. By reason is

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meant, primarily, *modern science*, which—breaking from classical science's valorization of contemplative, i.e., useless, knowledge—is conceived as a techne directed toward the domination and transformation of nature, nature too having been reconceived. In contradistinction to the classical idea of nature as a fixed and eternal order founding and bounding the realm of human action, modern science conceives of nature as, in theoretical terms, simply the level of analysis at which science is currently stalled, the answers to the latest set of scientific questions—questions which are, in principle, always open to revision and replacement with a new set of questions and a coordinate set of answers in an open-ended, potentially infinite progression. In practical terms, nature is the latest obstacle to be overcome in the expansion of human power, the latest problem to be solved, after which a new obstacle will present itself and a new solution will be demanded in what is, again, an open-ended, potentially infinite progression. In short, for modernity, nature does not provide the immutable outer boundaries of human action; rather, nature itself has become the boundless arena of human action, the "situation" in which we exercise our freedom, all of the problems and impediments we encounter being regarded as, ultimately, soluble.

This progressive overcoming of all merely temporary impediments provides a clue to the underlying teleological subordination of reason, actualized through the progress of science, to freedom, actualized through the progress of emancipation: the emancipation of all individuals from all limits to autonomy—natural, social, and psychological, whether imposed externally or internally. Autonomy, then, is the ultimate telos of modernity; modernity is the progressive concretization of the universalistic—i.e., egalitarian—individualism which ultimately has its historical roots in Christianity, and, to a lesser extent, Stoicism.

In concrete terms, modernity is characterized by the progress of science, secularization, and industrialization; the rise of the market economy and modern "civil society"—and beyond them, the rise of socialism and the welfare state; the spread of liberalism and democracy; the origin of nationalism and the nation state; the end of the *oikos*—the family primarily as social production and reproduction unit—and its replacement with companionate marriage and the modern family, a social unit ideally based on love;[4] the decline of republican virtue, direct democracy, and "the public realm," in favor of increasingly mediated, professionalized, and bureaucratic political orders—part of an overall trend toward abstract, institutionally and

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symbolically mediated social relationships; the growth of global trade, communications, and cultural formations; etc.[5]

Merquior sees the legitimation of modernity as the task of modern social theory, which he describes in the Introduction to *Rousseau and Weber.* Modern social theory is characterized by four main elements. First is *materialism*, broadly defined not as a form of reductionism, but simply as "a concern for determinisms affecting social processes" (RW 10); by "determinisms" Merquior means not simply causal necessitation, but also the objective constraints imposed upon free agents by their historical situation. Second is *empiricism*, again broadly defined as the abandonment of rationalistic speculation about the essences of man and social phenomena in favor of historical investigation into the evolution, structure, and functioning of actual societies. Third is what I shall call *anti-reductionism*; Merquior gives only one example of this in his Introduction—the analytical separation of society from the state, i.e., the recognition of the autonomy of social phenomena and their *irreducibility* to other sorts of phenomena—but his work is marked throughout by a general anti-reductionist strategy. Fourth is an "*emancipatory* drive" (RW 11, emph. in original). Merquior illustrates this in terms of Kant's essay "What Is Enlightenment?" which defines Enlightenment in terms of autonomy and emancipation as "man's release from his self-incurred tutelage."

Modernity and Individualism

Merquior's own positive vision of modern society emerges most clearly between the lines of *Rousseau and Weber.* The book consists of two long essays, on Rousseau and Weber respectively, framed by an Introduction and a long Conclusion. I regret that my attention to the political subtext of these essays makes it impossible to linger over the texts themselves, for they contain many exegetical and argumentative felicities which deserve careful consideration. Merquior's basic method is to set out both the strengths and weaknesses of Rousseau's and Weber's works, using Weber to criticize and complement Rousseau and Rousseau to criticize and complement Weber. What emerges is a hybrid intellectual who is neither Rousseau nor Weber, but who speaks, to put it diplomatically, with a slight Brazilian accent. . . .

What Merquior takes from Rousseau is the idea that the egalitarian individualism of modernity is best realized politically by "participatory democracy":

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> Put in a nutshell, *the greatest achievement of Rousseau's political philosophy was the reasoned identification of legitimacy with the idea of participatory deliberative democracy*. As a *result* of such constant individual participation in the politics of sovereignty, the general will encompasses an optimum of liberty and equality. If political equality is indeed . . . the hard core of the democratic ideal, and if on the other hand, political equality depends to a large extent on other dimensions of equality, then Rousseau's concern for liberty within maximized equality is simply the best classical formulation of the very idea of democracy. (RW 202, first emph. added)

While Merquior affirms both Rousseau's egalitarianism and his individualism, he is concerned to reject the rest of Rousseau's rationale for democracy, particularly his moral anti-modernism, revulsion against history, attachment to the polis and republican virtue, and contempt for specifically bourgeois culture and institutions. Merquior is also masterful in rebutting the common criticisms of Rousseau: the conservative criticism that Rousseau is an antinomian individualist; the liberal criticism that Rousseau's account of democracy is illiberal and even proto-totalitarian; the view, held by some contemporary French anthropologists, that Rousseau's work offers only a sweeping critique of modernity rather than a project of reconciliation with it. Merquior puts forth instead a radically individualistic interpretation of *The Social Contract*. He emphasizes the role of individual self-interest and utilitarian reasoning in creating the social contract in the first place. He also stresses that, once the social contract is entered into, Rousseau's general will contains within it an intrinsic space for individual rights and private interests:

> The strength and freedom of the individual, says Rousseau, are the prime instruments of his ability to survive. How can he, as he becomes a member of an all-demanding social covenant, surrender them to society without doing harm to himself? . . . The answer to this question lies in the idea of "a form of association that will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and the goods of each associate, and in which everyone, while uniting himself with all, still obeys himself alone and remains as free as before" (bk. I, ch. VI). Have we not indeed seen that the prime cause of the social bond was the general realization by men of their "common interest"? To a quite utilitarian question, a perfectly utilitarian answer. (RW 21)

Having rejected the anti-modernist elements of Rousseau's thought but accepted his egalitarian-individualist rationale for democracy, Merquior turns to Weber for a new, more satisfactory theory of

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modernity to complement Rousseau's participatory democracy. He finds this account in Weber's conception of *rationalization*. At the root of Weberian rationalization is a revolution in thinking, the "disenchantment" of the world which can be expressed in specifically philosophical terms as the fragmentation of the true, the good, and the beautiful, which in classical and Christian thinking are treated as transcendental aspects of the One, and which in Kantian philosophy are the objects of the three critiques. In modernity, the "true"—i.e., what is ultimately real—is reconceived as matter in motion, stripped of all teleology and form, and therefore of all intrinsic goodness and beauty; goodness and beauty are then subjectivized and aestheticized. Corresponding to this reconception of the true is the reconception of the faculty directed toward knowing the true: reason. In classical philosophy reason is teleologically subordinated to the pursuit of the intrinsically good and to the contemplation of the intrinsically beautiful, i.e., form. By contrast, in modernity the good and the beautiful are subjectivized, and reason, deprived of its natural ends, is subordinated to the passions, that is: reason becomes *instrumental*, and the processes of life and society are brought under increasing instumental-rational regulation in the name of economic and administrative efficiency—for the satisfaction of desire, and under the guidance of increasingly impersonal, formal, ultimately arbitrary (though not necessarily unreasonable) norms.

In an age of disenchantment and rationalization, all forms of legitimation based upon appeals to faith, a teleological conception of human nature, or the inherent sanctity of tradition lose their power to persuade. We live in an age in which human autonomy, reason, and freedom have reared up to their full height and have cast off all beliefs that cannot offer rational validation for themselves—i.e., which cannot be subordinated to the conquest of nature and the emancipation of mankind.

It is in this context that Weber develops his theory of political legitimacy, with its taxonomy of legal-bureaucratic, traditional, and charismatic forms of legitimacy. It is a theory which Merquior subjects to a sustained and withering—sometimes nitpicking—critique, the essence of which is that Weber's understanding of legitimacy is recalcitrantly "culturalist," meaning that it locates itself in a realm of belief, meaning, values, and ineffable historical particularities that lie outside the ken of instrumental reason and utilitarian calculation and therefore place moral limits on their scope and power, rather than falling within their boundaries and thus under their critical scrutiny. In rejecting

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Weber's culturalism, Merquior is rejecting any values that impede the utilitarian satisfaction of natural (i.e., bourgeois) passions through the application of instrumental rationality. Merquior ejects Weber's theory of legitimacy from his theory of modernity in order to replace it with one that is wholly instrumental-rational or utilitarian.

Merquior held that this utilitarian criterion of legitimation is best satisfied politically in Rousseauian democracy—suitably stripped of its anti-modernist, "culturalist" republican sentiments, reconciled to bourgeois civilization, and subordinated to the satisfaction of consumer desires. In short, the only institutions and norms that can claim legitimacy are *those which we have freely given ourselves* through a process of collective deliberation and decision-making that is entirely utilitarian: directed toward the preservation, enhancement, and satisfaction of specifically bourgeois cultural values.

What is the scope of Merquior's Rousseauian democracy? How far does it extend into the economic realm? Does it lie closer to the libertarian minimal state, or to social and economic democracy? Merquior was a classical liberal insofar as he thought that social and political institutions should arise out of, express, and satisfy the value preferences of self-interested individuals. He was not, however, a libertarian. He was critical of what he called (quite unfairly) the "rabid 'statophobia'" of Hayek and Nozick (LON 146) and believed that the market alone could not adequately express and satisfy the values characteristic of modernity. Specifically, he believed that the market must be supplemented by social democracy, bureaucracy, and even the democratization of the workplace.

Who are to be the legislators of Merquior's social democracy? Who is to harmonize the general will with the will of all by carefully crafting the proposals and programs to be voted upon? One particularly revealing moment of Merquior's critique of Weber's thory of legitimacy is a long discussion of a hybrid possibility neglected by Weber: *charismatic bureaucracy*, a form of technocratic steering legitimated ultimately by material success and utilitarian reasoning, but which gives rise to secondary forms of symbolic legitimation, such as democratic elections. Although these forms of legitimation originally gain their value through their instrumental relationship to material success, they gradually come to be valued in their own right (RW 122–30).

In sum: from Rousseau, Merquior takes egalitarianism, individualism, and participatory democracy. From Weber he takes a theory of modernization which stresses the progressive triumph of instrumental rationality, value-relativism, and bureaucratic administration. In the

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process, however, both theories are stripped of all "culturalist" elements, all appeals to non-utilitarian criteria and non-instrumental rationality. Through this fusion, Merquior emerges as a virtual paradigm of the secular, technocratic, liberal democrat: somewhat like a contemporary American liberal, although his moralism was held in check by his knowledge of social science and social possibilities; somewhat like a neoconservative, although without the faith in the effectiveness of legitimation by remnants of premodern traditions and belief systems.

Post-Liberalism and Historical Humanism

What is one to make of this? My first reaction was, frankly, astonishment. This is a vision of modern society rejected by social theorists from Daniel Bell and Edward Shils to Jürgen Habermas, one seemingly more at home in the pages of modernity's enemies than its defenders. Following theorists like Bell, I simply do not believe that Merquior's vision of a disenchanted, instrumental-utilitarian modernity is possible on its own terms; modern social and political institutions arise from and are sustained by premodern and even anti-modern social factors—the common life of evolved traditions and practices; the Protestant ethic of self-denial, hard work, and capital accumulation; religion and other forms of spiritual community; non-calculating, magnanimous civic virtue—all of which are in turn disenchanted and pulverized by modernity's all-consuming drive for emancipation from any externally imposed limitations on the exercise of the will.

It is, therefore, perhaps unsurprising that to my knowledge Merquior never so much as states, much less defends his vision in positive terms. Nor does he deal, in any sustained and serious fashion, with the neoconservative and civic republican thinkers who are the most profound—indeed, to my mind, unanswerable—critics of his position. Nor, too, is it surprising that we find that Merquior himself cannot sustain his own hyper-rationalist, hyper-utilitarian account of modern political legitimacy, for when we ask not "What legitimates modern political regimes?" but "What legitimates modern political legitimacy?" Merquior has no answer—beyond the claim that that his democratic, utilitarian technocracy makes the most sense, *given modernity*. But then the obvious questions are: What is modernity? Is it coherent or self-subverting? Why take it as given? Why not question its legitimacy?

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What legitimates it? Is Merquior's vision of modernity really "given" at all?

Here is where Merquior really gets interesting. Merquior legitimates his rationalist-utilitarian account of modern political legitimacy by what is, in effect, an appeal to existential thrownness. It makes no sense to ask "Why take modernity as given?" simply because it is given; we find ourselves thrown into the midst of the modern world. When we reflect upon our situation, we are faced with essentially two options regarding its legitimation. First, we can seek to understand, criticize, and transform our situation from within, drawing upon and thus affirming the self-critical and self-correcting impetus of modernity, particularly modernity's commitment to *reason*. Like Rousseau, we can ask not how to break out of the "chains" of our historical situation, but how to make them legitimate, rational, bearable. Second, we can cast aside self-understanding and the self-critical, self-correcting values of the Enlightenment, embrace any number of irrationalist "total critiques" of modernity, and bash our heads against the walls of an uncomprehended reality—or, what is more likely, dissipate ourselves in an essentially aestheticist anti-politics of symbolic acts and rhetorical gestures.

Merquior calls second option "hysterical humanism" or, more commonly, "*Kulturkritik*." He himself embraces the first, calling it "historical humanism." It is the most provocative and least developed aspect of his thought. Historical humanism is charged with the task of tracing out and understanding—and then criticizing or legitimizing—the roots of the modern world into which we are thrown. The nature and parameters of this project are, I believe, best programatically sketched not by Merquior, but by the British "post-liberal" thinker John Gray.[6] Gray's post-liberalism reconceives the task of political theorizing in a radically postmodern—or, as he prefers it, following Donald Livingston, "post-Pyrrhonian"—fashion.[7]

From this perspective, political theory is no longer about offering abstract arguments to "found" political practices. Rather, it begins with an established set of political institutions, practices, and traditions into which we are thrown—in our case, modern liberal democracy—and then seeks, through an act of historical-hermeneutical retrieval, to uncover their historical roots and to articulate their structural logic.

Once the historical roots and structural logic of the modern situation are exhumed, they are subject to critique and reform, or to legitimation. This, however, is not a task for the theorist as such. Postmodern political theory is, in general, loath to launch projects of

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cultural-political criticism and reform from some allegedly superior "critical" viewpoint, preferring instead to leave criticism and reform where they have, for the most part, always been and should be: in the hands of situated, knowledgeable, practical agents. This does not, however, imply that a theorist cannot offer concrete plans for reform, but only that he cannot do so simply qua theorist, but only qua experienced, engaged agent drawing upon a store of specifically practical knowledge. Indeed, since theoretical reflection is situated in the matrix of practical knowledge, rather than detached from it and opposed to it, a purely theoretical intellect is impossible; therefore, it is unavoidable that all theorists are to some extent qualified to pronounce upon practical matters.

By the same token, a purely practical agent, one whose actions are completely uninformed by theoretical presuppositions, is impossible also. Such an agent would have to be incapable of reflecting upon and conceptually articulating his situation and practices. He would, moreover, have to be isolated from the theoretical presuppositions embedded in language, culture, and tradition. It is necessary, therefore, to be able to separate those theoretical presuppositions which are enabling from those that are disabling. Thus postmodern theory has a second aspect: the skeptical-prophylactic project of deflating the pretensions of false philosophies and ideologies and of checking their deleterious effects on society.[8] Although Merquior's historical humanism embodies both the hermeneutical and the skeptical-prophylactic aspects of this postmodern approach, it is the latter aspect that is most developed. It is to this side of his work that we now turn.

Against Kulturkritik

The opposite of modern social theory and historical humanism, what Merquior calls hysterical humanism or *Kulturkritik*, is the topic of three largely polemical works: *Foucault* (London: Fontana, 1985; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987; henceforth cited as F); *Western Marxism* (London: Paladin, 1986; henceforth cited as WM); and *From Prague to Paris: A Critique of Structuralist and Post-Structuralist Thought* (London: Verso, 1986; henceforth cited as PTP). By *Kulturkritik*, Merquior simply means hatred (his word) of modernity. Defined this generally, of course, *Kulturkritik* is a phenomenon that spans the political spectrum, from conservatives longing for an idealized past to radicals longing for an idealized future. Merquior's actual use of the term is,

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however, usually much more specific and delimited. It refers to the hatred of specifically *bourgeois* institutions and culture. As such, *Kulturkritik* is primarily a phenomenon of the Left: from its mildest expression in the progressive, scientistic, industrialist anti-capitalism of the Old Left, to its most virulent manifestation in the New Left animus against science, technology, industry, progress, and even rationality itself. Merquior's concept of *Kulturkritik* refers, therefore, to approximately the same phenomenon that today's neoconservative cultural critics call the "crisis in the humanities" or the "politicization" of higher education. A close synonym is "postmodernism," especially of the Francophone variety: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida.

The common denominator of instances of *Kulturkritik* is not their critical aspect, nor is it their cultural orientation. Merquior clearly believes that there is a legitimate realm for the criticism of modern culture, for he practices it all the time. The common denominator is, rather, the *resources deployed* in effecting cultural criticism. In *Western Marxism* Merquior claims that *Kulturkritik*

> exhibits little sense of social constraints, particularly of an economic or socio-economic nature. Indeed, what sets [it] apart, beyond a mere shift from economics into culture, is the combination of a cultural thematics and the near absence of infrastructural weight in the explanation of cultural and ideological phenomena. (WM 4)

Instead of drawing on social science as both a tool of cultural criticism and as a critical delimitation of the powers and likely consequences, intended and unintended, of social action—particularly emancipatory praxis—*Kulturkritik* draws upon purely moral motivations and criteria, specifically a progressively radicalized egalitarian individualism, which offers criticisms and pursues ideals without concern for social causes, social contexts, and social consequences.

The basic strategy of Merquior's critique of *Kulturkritik* is astonishingly simple, but for all of its simplicity it is one not often tried or appreciated. A significant portion of anti-modernist and postmodernist *Kulturkritik* consists of factual claims—empirical claims, historical claims, claims about the interpretation of texts—which are either true or false in a fairly straightforward and unproblematic way. Merquior simply asks, "Which is it? True or false?" and goes about assembling the best available evidence upon which to make the decision.

If, however, one attempts to raise such factual considerations, the defender of *Kulturkritik* almost inevitably responds with a philosophi-

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cal objection, specifically an epistemological objection to empiricism or to truth as such. Foucault, Derrida, etc., are said, for example, to "problematize" truth and empirical knowledge; therefore, any attempt to confront them with facts is beside the point; it is simply a case of question-begging, for the status of facts is precisely what is at issue in the first place. The *Kulturkritiker* render themselves immune to all rational criticism by totalizing this skeptical gesture. By disavowing any explicit and substantive moral, political, or epistemological commitments (which, of course, remain operative as unshakeable and dogmatic—because critically inacessible—convictions), the *Kulturkritiker* render question-begging all criticisms that are not similarly totalistic, since these criticisms presuppose something—anything—that has been suspended in the "scare quotes" of "problematization." Consider, for example, the following passage from Mark Poster's negative review of *Foucault*:

> Theoretical and empirical work are interconnected: neither is very satisfying without the other. Concepts, principles of selection of data, explanatory strategies, hypotheses, political perspectives—all of these inform discourse in every discipline. At a minimum these elements of theory are reminders that no one has unmediated access to truth, that data are always shaped by the concerns of the knower in his/her present, that an insurmountable gap exists between the knower and the known, one that is always bridged in the production of discourse but one that always bears the traces of the bridge being crossed. To accuse someone of having a theory that "distorts the truth," as Merquior does Foucault, is to say that one does not have much liking for that particular theory.[9]

Passing by the self-contradiction of asserting that there is an "insurmountable" gap that is "always bridged," the thrust of this argument is clear. The criticism of a theory by reference to facts presupposes an essentially mystical "unmediated access to the truth"; there is no such access; therefore, no theory can be criticized by reference to facts.

Leaving aside the irony of the Cartesian odor of this allegedly postmodern skepticism, what is one to say to it? First, one should note that these "problematizing" gestures are almost never followed up by any actual, serious epistemological analyses of truth and experience. Because of this dearth of serious analysis, one is led inevitably to suspect that one is being hoodwinked by a largely empty rhetorical gesture.

More substantively, there is a very bad argument at work here: to wit, that because empiricism is certainly a bad *account* of our knowl-

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edge of the facts of reality, we now have license to treat reality, facts, objectivity, and reason *themselves* in a cavalier, even contemptuous manner. But this, of course, is a disastrous *non sequitur*. Dispensing with empiri*cism* does not license dispensing with *empeiria*, but simply demands that we undertake anew the task of accounting for the undeniable facts of our common world. In Merquior's words, "the laudable desire to escape from the triviality of empiricism ought not to take the form of a neglect of the empirical . . ." (RW 221). The drift of Merquior's attitude is, I think, well captured in a brilliant passage from Hannah Arendt's "Truth and Politics":

> Do facts, independent of opinion and interpretation, exist at all? Have not generations of historians and philosophers of history demonstrated the impossibility of ascertaining facts without interpretation since they must first be picked out of the chaos of sheer happenings (and the principles of choice are surely not factual data) and then be fitted into a story that can be told only in a certain perspective, which has nothing to do with the original occurrence? No doubt these and a great many more perplexities inherent in the historical sciences are real, but they are no argument against the existence of factual matter, nor can they serve as a justification for blurring the dividing lines between fact, opinion, and interpretation, or as an excuse for the historian to manipulate facts as he pleases. Even if we admit that every generation has the right to write its own history, we admit no more than that it has the right to rearrange the facts in accordance with its own perspective; we don't admit the right to touch the factual matter itself. To illustrate this point . . . During the twenties, so a story goes, Clemenceau, shortly before his death, found himself engaged in a friendly talk with a representative of the Weimar Republic on the question of guilt for the outbreak of the First World War. "What, in your opinion," Clemenceau was asked, "will future historians think of this troublesome and controversial issue?" He replied, "This I don't know. But I know for certain that they will not say that Belgium invaded Germany."[10]

We are, in short, dealing here with the kind of brute historical data which cannot be dismissed by any amount of epistemological or hermeneutical handwaving, simply because our knowledge of such data is always more certain and vivid than any of the skeptical arguments and rationalistic constructs that might be offered in their place.[11]

Third, even if we were to grant that there is no unmediated grasp of facts—and as a hermeneuticist I see no good reason why we shouldn't—Poster's argument still does not stand. Every theory deals with a delimited realm of phenomena. To criticize a theory on the basis

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of fact is to argue that it deals with certain facts badly or not at all. In order to deploy these facts against the theory in question, one need not have an unmediated access to them; one need only have an access to them that is not mediated *by the theory to be criticized*, or by a rival theory which one is advancing, for that would involve question-begging. One could, for instance, simply grasp the facts in question by perception or any other form of mediate awareness besides historical and scientific theories. These theories do not, moreover, create out of whole cloth the facts that they attempt to interpret; rather, they attempt to interpret facts which we initially encounter by other (mediate) means: perception, hearsay, historical records, anomalies in previously accepted theoretical frameworks, etc.

Finally, I think that in order to defend Merquior's approach, we must go beyond his own writings and self-understanding. The objection in question is specifically epistemological. I believe that Merquior eludes it ultimately because he implicitly presupposes a post-epistemological position: a non-foundationalistic, *pragmatic* account of ordinary and scientific knowledge and a descriptive, i.e., non-prescriptive, *phenomenological* account of the nature of philosophy. On such an account of knowledge, the existence of ordinary and scientific knowledge is a *fait accompli*, not an open question. Hence the descriptive, phenomenological conception of philosophy: If knowledge is an accomplished fact rather than an open question, then the real task incumbent upon philosophers is to give a descriptively adequate account of such knowledge—fidelity to ordinary knowledge being the measure of what counts as genuine philosophy, rather than philosophy being the measure of what counts as genuine knowledge, as is the claim of foundationalism. If a philosophical account of knowledge ends up arguing for the dubitability, obsolescence, or non-existence of ordinary knowledge in order to offer something else in its place, then we know that such a philosophy has failed in its proper task, for instead of conforming its categories to the contours of ordinary knowledge it is demanding that true knowledge conform to its categories, which are usually no more than rationalistic and reductionistic abridgements of experience.

As for the foundationalist contention that ordinary knowledge is criterionless and therefore uncritical and dogmatic prior to the philosophical legislation of norms: nothing could be further from the truth, for given a certain level of cognitive and cultural development, what is more ordinary, more "natural"—i.e., traditional, habitual, *second*-natural—than rational criticism and persuasion? Criteria for evaluating

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what is and what is not knowledge are not created by philosophical legislation, but are rather the evolved products of the "common law" of ordinary and scientific practice. Critical rationality is not exercised by suspending oneself in a basket outside of the world, but merely by taking up one's pen and responding to an offensive newspaper editorial. In short, ordinary and scientific knowledge provide us with the tools and purchase necessary to criticize philosophical constructs, and this, precisely, is what Merquior does.

Polemic vs. Dialogue

To a superficial reading, Merquior's polemical works often seem . . . superficial. This impression stems from several factors. First is the ease, elegance, and humor of his writing, which—reminiscent, for instance, of Hume—allow the reader to glide swiftly and frictionlessly past subtleties and difficulties that might better show up if he were forced to trudge slowly through thickets of a more Teutonic prose style. (I am reminded of Wittgenstein's exhortation against purified ideal languages: "Back to the rough ground!") Second, Merquior often succumbs to the intellectual vices of substituting exegesis for argument and irony for refutation. He is frequently just too polemical, delivering aphoristic potshots against psychoanalysis, modern art, hapless neo-Marxists, etc. where more sustained, subtle, and charitable arguments would be appropriate. Third, for all of his erudition, Merquior has a tendency to argue like a lawyer rather than a scholar. Typically, a chapter of one of his polemical works consists of a quick synopsis of his chosen victim's ideas followed by a sometimes tedious brief reporting on the divergent opinions of other scholars. Frequently, these opinions are fascinating and illuminating. But frequently they are just as tendentious and questionable as the views being attacked, leaving one with more questions than answers and the sneaking suspicion that Merquior is grabbing any stick that he can with which to beat his opponents. This impression is reinforced by the contradictory nature of some of his arguments. For instance, in *Western Marxism* he reproaches Habermas for being excessively subject-centered in his criticisms of the spontaneous, undesigned, "systems theoretic" forms of social integration characteristic of advanced industrial societies (WM, part III, ch. 3). In *Foucault*, however, Merquior takes Foucault to task for analyzing forms of domination in terms of spontaneous, undesigned systems rather than in terms of subjects who

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exercise power (F, ch. 8). Finally, Merquior has a tin ear for philosophical themes; I find that he is too often just plain wrong when dealing with thinkers such as Heidegger.[12] *Foucault* and *From Prague to Paris* are, for instance, extremely thin when it comes to accounting for the absolutely crucial influences of Husserl, Heidegger, and Nietzsche on Foucault and Derrida. (The account of Hegel in *Western Marxism* is far superior in this regard.) The critics, for the most part, have not been kind—with some justification.

The overly polemical, uncharitable quality of these works is no mere accident either; it is deeply rooted in Merquior's whole intellectual project. It is important to note that Merquior's defense of modernity is primarily negative and indirect rather than positive and direct. Unlike such rare thinkers as Hegel or Weber or Gellner who, in effect, accept the burden of legitimating modernity through sustained historical investigations and systematic theoretical arguments, Merquior *begins* by accepting the legitimacy of the modern age and then seeks simply to ward off its critics. Describing the critics of modernity, he writes: "Let no rhetoric conceal this: the burden of proof belongs to the accusers" (PTP 106). In other words, Merquior is a *merely* a defender, not a *theorist* of modernity.

Now there is, of course, nothing intrinsically wrong with this sort of project. After all, not everyone can be a Hegel or a Weber or a Gellner. Furthermore, intellectual etiquette aside, there is a certain pragmatic justification for such tactics. It is impressive to see just how well Merquior's polemics, like those of some contemporary neoconservative cultural critics, can clear away a certain amount of the epigonic underbrush that impedes intellectual progress (a flame-thrower being a more practical tool for this job than goat-like ruminations).

The trouble with this approach, though, is that it is suited best for one-sided ideological polemics, not for serious intellectual dialogue. In spite of his occasional gestures of conciliation, Merquior's critical works give the impression of someone impatient with the give and take of dialogue, closed to the possibility of enriching or revising his own perspective by learning from his opponents, and, intellectually speaking, out for blood. Genuine intellectual communication does not, for instance, begin with the adversarial gesture of shifting the burden of proof onto the shoulders of one's opponents. Rather, it requires that one always shoulder the burden of proving one's convictions against the most powerful arguments possible, *even if that means one has to invent them oneself.* In short, it requires that one adopt a permanent attitude of self-reflection and self-criticism. One must not

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argue like a lawyer, but listen like a judge. It is not enough to be a friend of reason; one must be a lover of wisdom as well.

The Cultural Contradictions of Modernity

Merquior's overly polemical style both supports and is supported by another shortcoming of his thought, one he shares with some neoconservative cultural critics. It is possible to begin a polemic only if the object of criticism is seen to be sufficiently *different* from one's own position. Furthermore, once one is committed to a polemical project, this will tend to head off the discovery of roots and goals common to both sides of the quarrel. In the case of Merquior and the neoconservatives, their polemics are founded upon treating leftist *Kulturkritik* as something foreign and inimical to the mainstream of the Western tradition.

But as Carl Rapp has argued brilliantly, postmodernists such as Lyotard and the deconstructionists simply recapitulate, unconsciously, the narrative of high modernity as articulated by the Enlightenment and Hegel: to wit, that the progress of human knowledge, both of self and world, leads to the progressive emancipation of mankind from limits to autonomy externally imposed by nature and history.[13] *Kulturkritik* simply represents a radicalization of modernity's universalistic ethics of egalitarianism, individualism, autonomy, and emancipation.

Further evidence for this thesis is provided by Merquior himself. For example, the portrait that emerges from *Foucault*—less as a conclusion than as an unintended consequence—is that Foucault's work illustrates the incompatibility of *negative liberty* (Merquior's ideal value) and *modernity* (Merquior's ideal era), specifically the incompatibility of negative liberty with progressive social rationalization, identified by Weber as an essential aspect of modernity.

The ideal of negative liberty is one of the central and enduring aspects of cultural modernity. Negative liberty demands the creation of a social space in which the choices, preferences, and will of each individual are sovereign—consistent with the equal freedom of others. Although negative liberty is often defended as necessary for the pursuit of the good, such pursuit is not what defines the essence of negative liberty; negative liberty is not simply the liberty to do right, but the liberty to do wrong as well; it is compatible with both the pursuit of the good and of the evil, the common denominator of the two being

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the *will*, the *choice*, of the individual to do one or the other. Thus negative liberty is dedicated to securing *the freedom of the will as such*, abstracted from anything that would sway it either toward good or evil, such as education into a communal ethos or complete sociopathy, adherence to a code of abstract moral principles or an unprincipled emotivism.

No idea makes more sense in the modern world than negative liberty, than *the political right to do wrong*—so long as this wrong does not violate the equal rights of others. Modernity, after all, was born not simply out of philosophical and scientific innovations, but out of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, in which Europe was plunged into decades of bloodshed because differing religious groups could not agree to disagree, could not grant the right of others to be and do wrong. This political experience, amply confirmed in the centuries since, is the true foundation of liberalism, and the only foundation that it needs.

Unfortunately, however, one might say that negative liberty makes *too much* sense. From the standpoint of negative liberty, *all* externally imposed restraints, standards, procedures, and hierarchies—and the systems of surveillance, information transfer, rewards, and sanctions that implement and perpetuate them—must show up as coercive intrusions upon the freedom of the will, *even those of liberal regimes themselves*. Now Weber identified the progressive spread of precisely these kinds of institutions and practices as one of the central features of social modernity, a process he called "rationalization." But if the ideal of negative liberty requires the individual to press back against all external intrusions upon the freedom of the will, *whether these are rational or irrational*—and if the central thrust of modernity is precisely the growth and ramification of techniques of administration, surveillance, control, *domination*—then, in the heart of modernity, there is a deep conflict between negative liberty, one of its central *cultural* ideals, and progressive rationalization, its central *social* phenomenon.

There is also an underlying causal connection between negative liberty and social rationalization, for *the prime motivating force of social rationalization is negative liberty itself.* Whether one pursues negative liberty through socialism, the welfare state, or the free market, its pursuit requires the progressive mastery and administration of the natural and social worlds, creating, as an unintended consequence, the subordination of the individual to pervasive forms of social integration and discipline. Life becomes progressively bureaucratized and administered, until negative liberty itself is undermined by the very institu-

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tions that were supposed to secure it. The preservation and exercise of freedom requires mastery. And just as mastery is the other side of freedom, so domination is the other side of mastery. Although Weber does not spin out this profoundly pessimistic scenario, the *Urform* of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in terms of negative liberty as such, he expresses its ultimate end quite vividly in the immortal "iron cage" metaphor on the gloomy closing pages of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.*

This dialectic of Enlightenment presents us with a choice: either rebel against negative liberty in the name of social rationalization, or rebel against social rationalization in the name of negative liberty. Weber himself refused to make this choice, but the thrust of his work points to the latter option, for the only glimmer of light that he saw through the bars of the iron cage was from the realm of the expressive, the aesthetic—in political terms, the charismatic—a topos later embraced unreservedly, but in rather different ways, by Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Heidegger, Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault, and others.

This conflict between negative liberty and social rationalization also accounts, more than any other factor, for the contemporary revolt against reason in the humanities, the pervasive view that reason is not a force for meliorism or emancipation, but instead is implicated in or responsible for domination and patriarchy, social and political oppression, psychological and sexual repression, terrorism and totalitarianism, Auschwitz and the Gulag.

The deeply Weberian structure of Foucault's thought is as striking as it is unexplored. Both possess a deep emotional commitment to egalitarian individualism and negative libertarianism. Both analyze the progress of modern society in terms of the growth of forms of domination which, in Foucault's analyses, become progressively more *systemic*, in the sense that domination is no longer exercised primarily by agents *qua* subjects, but rather by agents qua functionaries in progressively autonomous systems. Both were pessimistic about the direction of history and the prospects for progressive human emancipation, taking solace in the realm of the expressive: that which struggles to elude the domination of social reason, that which resists being co-opted by "the system."

In Weber's case this antinomian element is charisma, heroically struggling against its destiny, its bureaucratic routinization. In Foucault's thought the expressive has two foci. First is politics, of a sort: a theoretically evasive post-Marxist activism, a sort of permanent

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revolutionism of symbolic acts and rhetorical gestures, of demonstrations and protest marches, which never allows itself to issue in institutional—i.e., lasting and practical, but also limiting, dominating, and unromantic—solutions. It is as if Foucault wished to avoid totalitarianism by, in effect, advocating it piecemeal but refusing to stabilize and synthesize the pieces into a whole.[14] The second focus is individual self-creation, a process of aestheticist *Bildung* explored in his later works, particularly volumes two and three of the *History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*.[15]

What, I submit, could be more crudely modernist in its designs and sensibilities than this allegedly postmodernist libertarianism. What postmodernism amounts to in Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, etc. is little more than a *hypermodern* Left political activism combined with an enormous, systematic *failure of self-reflection* which allows them to believe that they are world-historical figures ushering in a new age rather than just the self-forgetful epigoni of the old.[16] (With Marx, at least, there was no pretense: his "libertarianism" was unabashedly modernist.[17])

This failure of self-reflection is not, however, a postmodernist monopoly. It is as much the vice of those neoconservative cultural critics who simply take the postmodernists at their word when they claim to be breaking with modernity and Western culture and then set to work defending "Western culture" from the barbarians at the gates. Like them, Merquior shows little sign of recognizing the egalitarian individualist roots and goals he shares with his opponents—even though, reminiscent of Daniel Bell, he sometimes refers provocatively to *Kulturkritik* as the clash between cultural modernism and modernity. Thus he ends up simply an inverted image of his opponents, affirming a conservative form of egalitarian individualism while criticizing a more radical one. And because he does not recognize the *identity* between his own thought and *Kulturkritik*, he never adequately articulates the *difference*.

This leads to a disastrous misdiagnosis of the seemingly permanent crisis of Western culture. If *Kulturkritik* is inimical to the West—but if it also represents the highest moral ideals of the West—then the West is not being murdered; it is committing suicide, and the medicine being prescribed turns out simply to be a diluted, conservative version of the very poison that is killing it.

This does not, however, imply that the cure is to junk the entire Western tradition from the fifth century B.C. on, to become *really* antimodern, à la certain Straussian "conservatives." This would simply be

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to replace slow suicide with outright self-destruction.[18] Perhaps this is simply a confession of a lack of moral imagination, but I cannot conceive of any serious alternative to some version of egalitarianism, individualism, and emancipation. What, after all, would such an alternative consist in? The legitimation of totalitarian or authoritarian dictatorship? The legitimation and even the revival of slavery? The legitimation of privilege and pull, vendetta and lynching, imperialism and plunder, oppression and domination, crime? To the extent that any of these phenomena exist today, they exist precisely as illegitimate, as moral anomalies, accidents to be progressively eliminated. Can anyone read the Old Testament accounts of tribal genocide and enslavement; the monuments of Assyrian kings boasting of entire populations slaughtered, enslaved, or transported; the histories of the Roman empire or any oriental despotism; stories of the Huns, Mongols, and other barbarian tribes spilling out of central Asia; reports of Aztec orgies of human sacrifice; or the countless eyewitness accounts of the horrors of Nazi and Communist extermination camps, and not take seriously the idea of egalitarian individualism, no matter how committed one might also be to a Herderian sort of tolerant cultural pluralism (itself a deeply egalitarian conception)? And if there is no alternative to egalitarian individualism, then any diagnosis and cure for the contemporary crisis of culture must come from within the Western tradition, but it cannot come about before we soberly realize the self-negating nature of our own highest ideals and deepest values.

Fortunately, although the chief *moral* values of Western culture are self-negating, our chief *cognitive* values are self-critical and self-correcting. I am talking, of course, about reason. Not the boundless rationalism of the French Enlightenment, reason red in tooth and claw, frenziedly pulverizing the natural and social worlds to replace them with its own artifacts. Rather, the reason of Hume, Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel, and in our own day Hayek: the restless, critical self-consciousness of the Enlightenment turned back upon itself, self-reflective, self-critical and self-delimiting; reason become aware of its own limitations, its own finitude, its historical situatedness and thrownness, yet still the defining characteristic of the rational animal. Self-critical reason can never err or sin. Only unself-critical "reason" can, and the corrective for the errors of "reason" is precisely critical reason itself. (A remark of Erich Heller's comes to mind: "What is Faust's sin? The restlessness of spirit. What is Faust's salvation? The restlessness of spirit.")[19]

In concrete terms, a political commitment to critical reason means at

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least three things: (1) the historical humanist project of uncovering the roots and structural logic of the modern situation, of recollecting who we are; (2) the skeptical deconstruction of the false and pernicious ideologies spawned from the vanity of modern foundationalism; and most importantly (3) the *delimitation* (but not destruction) of Western libertarianism. To delimit negative liberty means to recognize that, although it is an undeniable political value, it is not the *only* political value, and to treat it as such places the least realistic among us at war with the constraints of civilization. This is disastrous, for human flourishing is always concrete and particular, conditioned (but not overdetermined) by the historically evolved goods ingredient in the different cultures and communities into which we are thrown. Participation in the common life of a culture or tradition requires, however, not liberation, but the *submission* of the individual to constraints, i.e., to evolved norms, customs, practices, and institutions. This is as true of the most libertarian society as it is of the most conservative, for libertarianism requires the submission of the individual to the forms of social discipline, integration, and uncertainty intrinsic to the market system. It also requires the delimitation of spheres of individual rights and obligations.[20]

Such a project of delimitation can be executed only through the evolution of a vocabulary of *enabling constraints*. All civilizations are founded upon difference, repression, constraint; the solution to the alienation of civilized life cannot, therefore, be to abolish constraints as such, for that would be to abolish civilization. Rather, the solution lies in using the best evidence of the social and human sciences to sort out which constraints enable us and which disable us in pursuing the concrete, historically given goods of our particular cultures and communities.

A commitment to a specifically self-reflective, self-critical conception of rationality also allows us to break down the sometimes overly facile distinction between intellectual modernism and postmodernism that Merquior holds. "Postmodernism" is an extremely ambiguous term, indiscriminately conflating many radically different strands of thought.[21] At its worst, postmodernism combines the posture of total criticism of modernity with a totally dogmatic commitment to hypermodern Left political activism. However, at its best—in the works of such writers as Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, and Ricoeur—the postmodern turn is simply and self-consciously a radicalization of the self-critical, self-correcting spirit that Hegel identified as the essence of modernity. In order to avoid this ambiguity—and to acknowledge a

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crucial debt to Kant's critical philosophy—I think that it is best to follow James L. Marsh in labelling the latter form of postmodernism "critical modernism."[22] G.B. Madison expresses the critical modernist project well:

> I may tend, in some of my writings, to portray "postmodernism" as some kind of new "period"—but it isn't. Postmodernism is simply . . . a critical reflection on "modernity"—and a critical attempt to appropriate, in a nonfoundationalist, postmetaphyical way, what is of worth in it—which is a lot.[23]

Now it may be stretching a bit to incorporate Merquior's work into such a liberal, critical modernist project, but advocates of critical reason need all the friends they can get.[24]

NOTES

1. Works in this category include *Razao do Poema (ensaios de crítica e estética)* (Rio: Civilizacao Brasileira, 1965); *Arte e Sociedade em Marcuse, Adorno e Benjamin (ensaio crítico sobre a escola neohegeliana de Frankfurt)* (Rio: Tempo Brasileiro, 1969); *A Astúcia da Mimese (ensaios sobre lírica)* (Rio: José Olympio, 1972); *Saudades do Carnaval (introducao à crise da cultura)* (Rio: Forense, 1972); *Formalismo e Tradicao Moderna (o problema da arte na crise da cultura)* (Rio: Forense, 1974); *Verso Universo em Drummond* (Rio: José Olympio, 1975); *L'Esthétique de Lévi-Strauss* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1977); *De Anchieta a Euclides: breve história da litteratura brasileira* (Rio: José Olympio, 1977); *O Fantasma Romántico e outros ensaios* (Petropolis: Vozes, 1980); *As idéias e as formas* (Rio: Nova Fronteira, 1981); *A natureza do processo* (Rio: Nova Fronteira, 1982); *Crítica, 1964–1989. Ensaios sobre arte e literatura* (Rio: Nova Fronteira, 1990); "Spider and Bee: Towards a Critique of the Postmodern Ideology," in Lisa Appignanesi, ed., *Postmodernism: ICA* [Institute of Contemporary Arts] *Documents* (London: Free Association Books, 1989); and "Vico, Joyce y la ideología del alto modernismo," *Cuadernos Americanos. Nueva Epoca* no. 10/vol. 4 (July-August 1988): 9–23.
2. These works include *O Estructuralismo dos Pobres e outras questoes* (Rio: Tempo Brasileiro, 1975); "Brazil's New Republic: The Social-Liberal Path," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 6 (1987): 269–77; "More Order than Progress? The Politics of Brazilian Positivism," *Government and Opposition* 17 (1982): 454–68; "El otro Occidente (Un poco de filosofía de la historia desde Latinoamérica)," *Cuadernos Americanos. Nueva Epoca* no. 13/vol. 1 (January-February 1989): 9–23; "Patterns of State-Building in Brazil and Argentina," in John A. Hall, ed., *States in History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); "Power and Identity: Politics and Ideology in Latin America," *Government*

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and Opposition 19 (1984): 239–49; and "Raymond Aron desde América del Sur: Un liberalismo differente," *Vuelta* no. 138 (May 1988): 61–4.

3. Other works in the category include *O Argumento liberal* (Rio: Nova Fronteira, 1983); "Defensa del Bobbio," *Nexos* 11/no. 130 (October 1988): 31–44; "Defense of Vico from Some of His Admirers," in Giorgio Tagliacozzo, ed., *Vico and Marx: Affinities and Contrasts* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1983); "For the Sake of the Whole," CRITICAL REVIEW 4, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 301–25; "From Marcionism to Marxism," CRITICAL REVIEW 2, no. 4 (Fall 1988): 101–13; "Georges Sorel and Max Weber," in W. Mommsen and J. Osterhammel, eds., *Max Weber and His Contemporaries* (London: German Historical Institute, 1987); *"Glasnost,* Please, in Marxology Too," *Government and Opposition* 22 (1987): 302–14; "Una panorámica del renacimiento de los liberalismos," *Ciencia Política. Revista Trimestral para América Latina y España* no. 12 (1988): 23–33; "Philosophy of History: Thoughts on a Possible Revival," *History of the Human Sciences* 1 (1988): 23–31; "The Politics of Transition: On the Work of Ernest Gellner," *Government and Opposition* 16 (1981): 230–43; "Reinterpretando la Revolución," *Cuadernos Americanos. Nueva Epoca* no. 16/vol. 4 (July-August 1989): 11–31; and "Virtue and Progress: The Radicalism of Georges Sorel (1847–1922)," in John A. Hall, ed., *Rediscoveries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).
4. For indications that the "modern" family has appeared in premodern times, particularly in England, see Alan MacFarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) and Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
5. John R. Love, in *Antiquity and Capitalism: Max Weber and the Sociological Foundations of Roman Civilization* (New York: Routledge, 1991), argues persuasively that central features of modernity, such as the end of the *oikos* and the rise of market capitalism, were present in Roman civilization. Hegel, in the *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), points out other, more negative features of modernity that were present in Roman civilization: the loss of a common ethical life, the usurpation of the public realm by the imperial bureaucracy, the rise of atomistic individualism constrained by abstract and mechanical laws, etc. See esp. 221–2.
6. John Gray outlines his post-liberal program in his "Postscript: After Liberalism," in his *Liberalisms: Essays in Political Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1989), esp. 261–4.
7. *Liberalisms*, 266n31.
8. For two accounts of the nature and consequences of the deformation of practical reason by foundationalism, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982), and F.A. Hayek, *The Counter-Revolution of Science: Essays on the Abuse of Reason* (1952), 2nd. ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1979).

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9. Mark Poster, "Why Not to Read Foucault," CRITICAL REVIEW 3, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 155–60, 158, emph. added.
10. Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics," in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking, 1968), 238–9.
11. This principle—that our knowledge of our common world and its contents is always more vivid and certain than any skeptical arguments against them—is the core of G.E. Moore's commonsensical refutations of various forms of skepticism about the external world. John O. Nelson calls this "the principle of weighted certainties," formulating it as "we ought never give credence to that of which we are less certain over that of which we are more certain." See his excellent little essay "In Defense of Moore's 'Proof of an External World,'" *Reason Papers* no. 15 (1990): 137–40. The quotes are from p. 139.
12. On Heidegger, see Merquior's "El Logocidio Occidental," *Vuelta* no. 149 (April 1989): 7–11, and "Heidegger: más allá del nazismo," *Vuelta* no. 142 (September 1988): 58–61.
13. Carl Rapp, "The Crisis of Reason in Contemporary Thought: Some Reflections on the Arguments of Postmodernism," CRITICAL REVIEW 5, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 261–90.
14. For a positive account of Foucault's theoretically evasive activism, see Thomas R. Flynn's "Foucault as Parrhesiast: His Last Course at the Collège de France," in James Bernauer and David M. Rasmussen, eds., *The Final Foucault* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988) and esp. Flynn's "Foucault and the Politics of Postmodernity," *NOÛS* 23 (1989): 187–98.
15. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1984) and *The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, Pantheon, 1986).
16. To be fair to Foucault, Lyotard, and Derrida, the value of their work cannot be reduced solely to the value of their stances vis-à-vis modernity. Their stances, moreover, are somewhat ambivalent. Foucault, for instance, in his late lecture on Kant's essay "What is Enlightenment?," identifies his own form of critique with the tradition of Kantian critical philosophy, thus resituating himself within the horizon of modernity. See Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984). See also Jürgen Habermas's "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present: On Foucault's Lecture on Kant's *What is Enlightenment?*," in his *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, ed. and trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989). Carl Rapp has suggested to me that the pragmatic paradoxes of Lyotard's stance toward modernity are so glaring that his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), might well be a giant exercise in Swiftean irony—an irony which, it should be noted, has been lost on most of Lyotard's devoted readers. Finally, Derrida

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is reported recently to have claimed that deconstruction is not antirational, but rather an attempt to build a more reasonable form of rationalism which takes into account such things as psychoanalysis. Deconstruction too, then, is an attempt to use reason to trace out or delimit the powers of reason, which is precisely the task of the Kantian critical philosophy. See Peter Aspen, "An anxious 60 minutes with Derrida," *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, February 21, 1992: 4.

17. See Agnes Heller, "Marx and Modernity" in Agnes Heller and Ferenc Fehér, *The Grandeur and Twilight of Radical Universalism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1991).
18. See Stanley Rosen, "A Modest Proposal to Rethink Enlightenment," in his *The Ancients and the Moderns: Rethinking Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).
19. Quoted in Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1978), 160–61.
20. Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* is my model for the delimitation of the public ethics of negative liberty (and of its private, subjective counterpart, the Protestant or Kantian ethics of equality, dignity, and individual conscience) by sublating them within the common or "ethical" life (*Sittlichkeit*) of tradition and culture. Although I would quibble with some of Hegel's economic policies, I find his overall argument, and its dialectical method of unfolding, to be utterly compelling.
21. On the manifold meanings of "postmodern," see Allan Megill, "What Does the Term 'Postmodern' Mean?" *Annals of Scholarship* 6 (1989): 129–51.
22. See James L. Marsh, *Post-Cartesian Mediations: A Essay in Dialectical Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1988), xi, 254–7. For clear exemplifications of the differences and conflicts between the critical modernist and uncritical modernist strands of postmodernism, see James L. Marsh, Merold Westphal, and John D. Caputo, eds., *Modernity and its Discontents* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992) and Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, eds., *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989).
23. G.B. Madison, personal correspondence. Other thinkers whom I would include under the general rubric of "critical modernism" are Jürgen Habermas, Thomas McCarthy, and other members of their school; Calvin O. Schrag; and Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut.
24. The clearest expression of a sympathy between Merquior's work and the critical rationalism of Kant, Hegel, etc. is Merquior's review essay on the work of Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, two Fichtean (!) liberals with whose position I have much sympathy. See J.G. Merquior, "The Renaissance of French Political Theory," *Government and Opposition* 22 (1987): 101–14. See especially Merquior's positive remark (on p. 109) on Ferry and Renaut's "D'un retour à Kant," in their *Systeme et Critique* (Brussels: Ousia, 1984). It is from this essay by Merquior that I crib the phrase "friends of reason."

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Jeffrey Friedman
Ernest Gellner

J.G. MERQUIOR
1941–1991

I never set eyes on José Guilherme Merquior, but even now, more than a year after his death, I feel his loss as I would that of a lifelong friend.

José discovered CRITICAL REVIEW in 1987, when he had recently been named Brazilian Ambassador to Mexico. At the time I was a graduate student in history, just dipping my feet into the murky waters of Western Marxism and post-structuralism, primarily for the sake of the journal. So I knew about Merquior, the author of *Western Marxism*,[1] *Foucault*,[2] and *From Prague to Paris: A Critique of Structuralist and Post-Structuralist Thought*[3]—the only well-informed book-length criticisms of these subjects of which I was aware. If there were to be a dialogue concerning these topics in our pages, Merquior would be a major participant. His books would provide fodder for the *pros* to review, and he would have to be one of the *cons*. So Merquior was, to me, a "catch." At the time, my hope was simply to bring classical liberalism into engagement with contemporary intellectual currents. Merquior might help.

He did help, and he was planning to do more. Given his intellectual range, he could have made contributions at the highest level to every debate CRITICAL REVIEW was concerned to enter, from philosophy to politics, from history to anthropology, from sociology to economics. My only problem was narrowing down the list of topics to ask him to write about. In the end, he discussed Lukács[4] and Dumont[5] in our pages; a major piece on the thought of Ernest Gellner was in the works, and when that was finished I had a list of suggestions as long as my arm. The Dumont paper

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in particular is a delight, a model of historically grounded, sociologically astute, philosophically self-aware scholarship of the sort postlibertarianism can only hope to emulate. In the current issue we are pleased to translate an old but hardly obsolete paper of José's from the French and to publish one of his lectures on culture. They display all the qualities that made José the most challenging writer I have had the pleasure of editing: his gigantic erudition, spanning every field and, it often seemed, every language; his delight in pressing intellectual limits—taxing the knowledge of mere mortals like his editor, and overcoming the limits of language by inventing compound neologisms to match his vast synthetic powers; and his stubborn political liberalism, so insistent as at first to seem retrograde and obtuse, until one realizes that it was based on a clear-eyed appreciation of the wonders and pleasures of modernity, something that is often lost upon intellectuals who are apt to notice only modern troubles and dangers.

As we corresponded and spoke, the prospect of years of comradeship and collaboration opened up before me and I relished it. This was, after all, why I had eschewed a normal life in favor of editing CRITICAL REVIEW: to find intellectual companionship such as was now offered by José.

The nature of his attitude toward ideas was an inspiration. His books often display a polemical bent that suggests dogmatism, but I think this would be a misinterpretation. Rather, José was impatient with those he saw as being in the grip of their own (or others') notions. Glittering ideas were for him common enough coin that they demanded not to be worshipped idolatrously but to be spent—tested against reality in order to see what purchase they had on truth. The all-too-common tendency to burrow into the first comprehensive view of the world one stumbles on, defending it against all subsequent challenges, was so foreign to José that he perhaps mistook it for mendacity when he encountered it in others, and he treated it as such in his works. He was too far beyond such limitations to understand them. Not only did this not indicate that he had a closed mind; it actually reflected his true cosmopolitanism—of ideas as well as of experience. He was not so wrapped up in a given philosophy or worldview that he could part with it only at the cost of losing his identity: he was actually a pleasure to disagree with. His bearing toward ideas was one of aristocratic independence.

As a friend, he was princely. I admit feeling privileged and somewhat mystified as to why this world-class thinker cared about my obscure journal—and mystified, too, about how he managed to write, and *read*, as much as he did, while pursuing a successful career as a diplomat and squeezing in phone calls to lord knows how many friends. He was unfail-

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ingly generous with all the things that are rarest—time, interest, kindness, humor, warmth. I was lucky to know him, so lucky.

Suddenly, I think in September of 1990, he was being treated for cancer. This was doubly ominous to me, since the only remotely comparable figure I had met through CRITICAL REVIEW, Miroslaw Dzielski, had been suddenly struck down by cancer in 1989, just after I had met him during his trip to the United States on behalf of newly liberated Poland. Yet José betrayed no great alarm, and we proceeded with the editing of his Dumont paper. He was to be in New York for treatment at the end of the year, but circumstances prevented me from meeting him at last. In early February I called his home in Paris to tell him that his paper was finally in print, only to learn that he had died weeks before, in New York.

Unfortunately, no words in praise of José Merquior meliorate the tragedy of his passing.

NOTES

1. J.G. Merquior, *Western Marxism* (London: Paladin, 1986), reviewed in CRITICAL REVIEW 2, no. 4 (Fall 1988): 114–26. Merquior's reply is in CRITICAL REVIEW 3, nos. 3–4 (Summer-Fall 1989): 600–602.
2. *Id.*, *Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), reviewed in CRITICAL REVIEW 3, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 155–60. Merquior's reply is in CRITICAL REVIEW 4, nos. 1–2 (Winter-Spring 1990): 287–90.
3. *Id.*, *From Prague to Paris: A Critique of Structuralist and Post-Structuralist Thought* (London: Verso, 1986), reviewed in CRITICAL REVIEW 3, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 7–39.
4. *Id.*, "From Marcionism to Marxism," CRITICAL REVIEW 2, no. 4 (Fall 1988): 101–13.
5. *Id.*, "For the Sake of the Whole," CRITICAL REVIEW 4, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 301–25.

—Jeffrey Friedman

* * *

José Merquior was a professional Brazilian diplomat, a university scholar and a thinker, and a prolific writer.

It would be facile to say that he was the outstanding scholar amongst diplomats and the outstanding diplomat amongst scholars. But there was far more to him than that. His erudition was indeed outstanding: his great passion was the history of ideas and the development of thought about man and society, and in this field, he made it his business to ensure that he had read and understood everything. It is doubtful whether anything escaped him. Few professional scholars could equal him in range of

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knowledge. As he moved from one diplomatic post to another—Paris, Bonn, London, Montevideo, Mexico City, Paris again—the logistic problems of moving his superb library must have strained the resources of even the Brazilian Foreign Office. José's library was not for display, but for use: his soul was unquestionably located in it.

When he arrived at his post in London, Brazil was still a military dictatorship (personalities seemed to be generally known both by their function and their military rank), and at the same time, Latin America was still the next promised land for the international romantic left, hopefully anticipating a Second Coming in the form of Guevara-style revolutions. In those days, one could almost tell the more radical intellectuals of Hampstead and Islington by their carefully acquired Spanish accents, for they kept themselves in readiness to fly out as soon as the Revolution had really come.

José somehow effortlessly spanned the two opposed worlds, the rulers and the thinkers, the paternalists and the critics, entertaining the radical intellectuals (he really loved both ideas and their bearers, two loves which do not always go together).

Superficially this might seem paradoxical, but it was a fact. He had come from the hothouse of Lévi-Strauss's Paris seminar— where characteristically he had obtained his second doctorate—and quickly set about working for a third one, and seeking out a similar world in London. With Lévi-Strauss, it was the brilliant fireworks rather than the ethnography which had attracted him. Perhaps London did not altogether offer an equivalent, so Merquior soon created his own. His parties sparkled with philosophically well-informed wit.

Those who only knew him superficially may well on occasion have underestimated him. They might have seen him as a specially charming specimen of the Rio-Paris cultural axis, in which the sons of the best Brazilian families immersed themselves in the latest Parisian wave.

Some of his earlier writings offered a measure of support for such an assessment: he had read everything, summed it up with elegance, then, after three paragraphs, dismissed it with an aphorism, and proceeded to deal with the next affectionately dissected victim, much as, at a party, one might introduce each guest with a perceptive, kind but not altogether anodyne description before turning to the next arrival.

But there was much, much more to José Merquior than that. Underneath the elegant diplomat-intellectual, or intellectual-diplomat, there was an extremely serious and penetrating thinker, much given to sober but ruthless dissection of the illusions of his epoch and milieu. Particularly memorable, for instance, is an essay which contained a quietly brutal

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account of so-called Dependency Theory, once a much favored diagnosis of the ills of Latin America and other parts of the world.

He pointed out that it was at heart but a perpetuation, in economic and macro-sociological terms, of Latin American collective self-pity, a new version which simply replaced the conquistadors with North Atlantic capital. His work on neo-Marxism, which will live, had a similar quality. The familiarity with anthropology he had acquired from Lévi-Strauss blended with his passion for the history of ideas, and resulted both in a very persuasive linkage of the romantic nineteenth-century conception of culture with its successors amongst contempory cultural anthropologists, and in his work on the relationship between culture and political legitimacy. His last book, completed but not yet published at the time of his death, was, significantly, devoted to an analysis of the continuity and relevance of the liberal political tradition.

This represented the underlying thrust of his work: the concern with understanding, and assisting, the forces which could make for a stable, liberal, participatory society in the developing world, one in which the share in both goods and values would also be better distributed. His contribution to this endeavor was already very significant, both in the field of theory and of practice. His tenure at a post with the Brazilian Embassy in London coincided with the Brazilian *Apertura,* the transformation of a paternalist authoritarian regime into one committed to freedom, the rule of law, and to economic orthodoxy.

Whilst the then Brazilian Ambassador to the Court of St. James was mainly concerned with the economic side, Merquior orchestrated the cultural, political and ideological aspects. The consequence was a series of conferences and seminars which enabled the intellectuals he had come to know so well in Europe to meet, for a change, at a pool-side in Brasilia or on the beach in Rio rather than a West End party. They ranged from conservatives to leaders of neo-Marxism, they were assured of large and attentive audiences, and the well publicized operation helped make clear that the *Apertura* was for real.

As Brazilian Ambassador to Mexico he represented one of the world's two greatest debtors to the other, no trivial task (though this was in no way allowed to diminish the flow of his writing and reading). He was a member of the Brazilian Academy, a select body with very limited membership, and one which can consequently lay some claim to conferring immortality. He held a Ph.D with two bars, and he had certainly earned them. His achievements at both levels might well have in the end made him one of the few philosopher-kings of the century, and—a rarer claim—one whose efforts were effectively committed to the furtherance of liberal values, rather than of the illusions of the age.

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He is survived by a widow whose great charm, ironic humor and earthy common sense has unquestionably given him great support in his work and thought.

—*Ernest Gellner*

Ernest Gellner, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB2 3RF, telephone (0223) 334599, telefax (0223) 334748, is the author of, inter alia, *Plough, Sword and Book* (Chicago, 1989).

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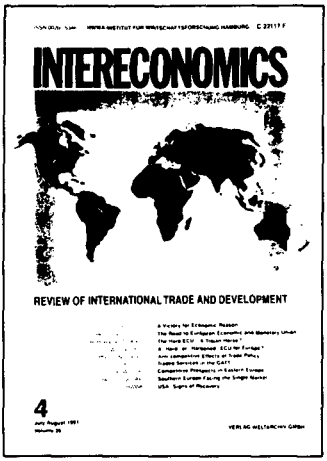

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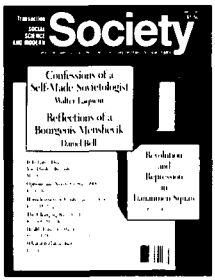

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